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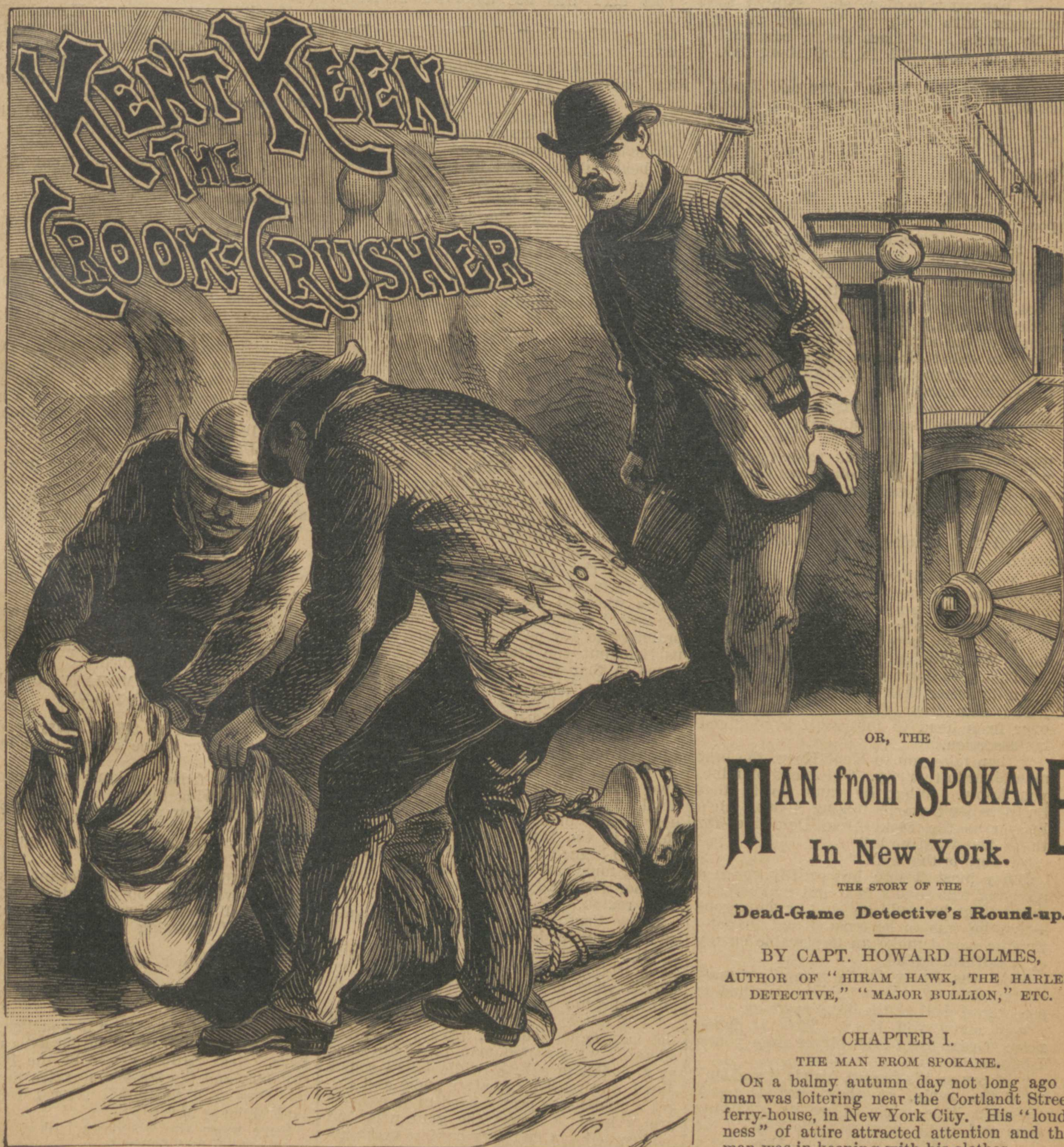
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THE MAN FROM SPOKANE HAD FALLEN INTO THE HANDS OF CROOKS.

OR, THE

MAN from SPOKANE In New York.

THE STORY OF THE

Dead-Game Detective's Round-up.

BY CAPT. HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "HIRAM HAWK, THE HARLEM
DETECTIVE," "MAJOR BULLION," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN FROM SPOKANE.

ON a balmy autumn day not long ago a man was loitering near the Cortlandt Street ferry-house, in New York City. His "loudness" of attire attracted attention and the man was in keeping with his clothes.

He was perhaps thirty, inclined to florid-

ness of face, with closely cropped, blond mustache, that overshadowed a large, prominent mouth.

But in his deep blue eyes was a merry twinkle betokening humor, if not good-will, to all men.

He seemed to enjoy his idleness, although he keenly scanned the people who came from the ferry, and now and then watched some particular person with more than passing interest.

Had any one asked this lounge his name, he would have told him that it was Jimsy Curt; and Jimsy, apparently, had both money and spare time, the latter of which was spent on the busy streets and in the vicinity of the ferries.

On this day Mr. Jimsy was apparently watching for no one, in fact; yet, as we have said, every passenger from across the river was under his surveillance—none passed that could escape the scrutinizing eye of Jimsy.

All at once there emerged from the ferry-house a man who attracted the watcher, and at the same time this person caught sight of the ferry statue, for he came toward him.

Jimsy waited with a half-hidden smile on his lips.

"I beg your pardon, sir," saluted the stranger with a strong Western twang, "My name is William Swift, commonly called Broncho Bill in and about Spokane."

"Howdy, Mr. Swift," returned Jimsy, cheerily, as he held out his hand, which was immediately grasped by another as with the grip of a vise.

"Glad to welcome you to New York. Never been to the metropolis before, I take it?"

"My first trip. You are a citizen, I suppose?"

"Yes, one of the old stand-bys. Born in d'e Bowery, but, for all that, I'm cosmopolitan—good all around. Ha, ha!"

"Well, I'm just from the West, from Spokane, as I've hinted, and I'm here on a little business," which served to draw Jimsy to the stranger in a manner calculated to enlist Broncho Bill's confidence, and the next moment Mr. Curt had taken the visitor in tow.

Was this the country fly for which the city spider had been waiting?

"Where will I find the police headquarters?" asked the man from Spokane, who was tall and raw-boned, with no surplus flesh on his well-knit figure.

Jimsy stared at the stranger and fell back a step.

"Did d'ey touch you on d'e ferry?" he asked.

"No, sir. I'd like to see the man slick enough to rob me," was the answer. "I haven't been touched since I left Spokane. I want to see the police on another matter. I am here on a little man-hunt, that's what you call it, I suppose."

"Then you don't want to see the police, I can do better than that for you."

The man from Spokane looked Jimsy over from head to foot as if he doubted his assertion.

"I can take you to Kent Keen, the best man-taker in this city. Old friend of mine, you know. What he can't do in the business isn't worth talking about. He's known as the Dead-Game Detective—for that's just what he is."

"Where is this man?"

Jimsy most closely, but swiftly, made a study of this man's face and make-up, to decide that he could be kind or dangerous—that he was to be trusted and feared—that he would make an implacable enemy or a faithful friend.

This was Jimsy Curt's mental estimate of the man of whom he was destined to see a good deal as the days went by.

"I'll show you Keen. He's at home now. Great town this; bigger than yours, I take it."

"Of course it's bigger, 'cause it's older," was the reply, as they moved away. "Wait a little while. Give us breathing time and we'll show you the city of the far West. We'll beat your New York, with its greatness. You can't spread, I see by the map. You're hemmed in, as it were, but Spokane can reach to the ho-

rizon, and, then, we've got the grit and—yes, and the people."

This rather floored Mr. Curt, and for some moments he walked beside William Swift, whose only baggage he seemed to carry in his great brown hand in the shape of a small valise, which could not have held very much.

Jimsy did not think it worth while to take the elevated cars. He could reach Kent Keen in less time than by the cars, for there was a short cut, which he utilized.

"Here we are—this is where Keen, the Keenest, lives," said the man in the checkered suit, as he stopped in front of a large building whose lower portals stood invitingly open, and, ushering William Swift into the structure, he conducted him up a flight of steps and thence down a corridor to a certain door.

"That you, Jimsy?" was asked, as the city sport opened the door.

"It's me, Kent, and here's a gent what wants to consult you."

By this time the head and broad shoulders of the man from Spokane towered over Jimsy's lesser ones, and the person who saw them arose from a chair and came forward.

This man was not unknown in New York.

He was Kent Keen, the Dead-Game Detective, as Jimsy had called him—a man always called in in baffling cases, and who enjoyed, as no other one man did, the confidence of the superintendent.

He was good looking, well built, and about thirty-five years of age.

Broncho Bill pushed past Jimsy Curt and held out his hand in the friendliest manner, but the detective special did not wince as the long brown fingers closed about his own like the jaws of a steel trap.

Jimsy looked beamingly at the special, and turned to the door, as if to depart.

"Let your man remain," said Swift. "Mine is no secret, and, then, I would not have found you, Mr. Keen, if it had not been for him."

Jimsy, eager to hear about the Westerner's business in New York, was not loth to remain, and did so.

"It's just this way," began Broncho Bill, when he had mentioned his Western nickname to the detective. "I am here on the hunt of an old friend of mine. I don't know by what name he is going under here, but we knew him as Mohave Merle."

"A Western name like yours, I see."

"Exactly. Fifteen years ago we were together in the deserts and the mountains. We were the owners of several little mines in the Tula country, where some made fortunes and a great many did not. Those who did not are there yet—in the graveyard. Merle and I had a mine which promised to pay us well. In fact, it made us rich, but you know how we lose fortunes in that wonderful land where men carry their hearts on their sleeves and death on their hips."

Kent Keen nodded.

He already liked this rough man; he admired his frankness of looks and speech.

"By and by," continued William Swift, "we drifted apart, and all because the devil of greed got possession of Mohave's heart. The man swindled me out of my shares in the Red Feather, sold me out root and branch while I was off on a prospecting tour, and when I came back I was as poor as Grizzly Ben, the tramp of the Tula region."

Jimsy Curt leaned toward the speaker and said, under his breath:

"It won't be good for that man Mohave if this American lynx catches him. That's what he's here for—to find and to put under his paw."

"I didn't look for Mohave Merle," said the man from Spokane, after a moment's silence. "I was too mad to do anything at first, but in a little while I had cooled down, and resolved to start anew and forget him. It was pretty hard to do either—pretty hard to forget the man who had bankrupted you and very hard to make another raise in a region where the mines were beginning to play out. I simply pulled up stakes and went off. I became a

gold tramp like thousands of others similarly situated. I had my ups and downs, and at last I seldom thought of Mohave Merle. Certain it was that I never looked for him—never tried to strike his trail."

"But you are after him now?" asked the detective.

"Yes. I want to find him. He was here ten years ago."

Curt uttered a cry, and a smile overspread his face.

"People die in New York," intimated the ferry lounge.

"And out West, too," added Broncho Bill, "but out there generally with their boots on."

Jimsy nodded; he understood.

"Ten years ago this man executed a note which was to pay me back," William Swift went on. "Ten years ago he was seen in this city by Desert Dan, who came East on a little business. He ran across Mohave on Broadway, dressed like a nabob, and seemingly enjoying life."

"Mohave took Dan home, showed him the palace he lived in, and the pretty little child he was raising, some day, he said, to have all his money—all but what he intended to pay me."

"He acknowledged his shortcomings, then?"

"He did, and squarely. He told Dan how the devil had tempted him, and how he had added to the stolen pile till he was rolling in wealth. He opened his desk and drew up the note which he gave to Dan to take to me. I've got it here."

Broncho Bill opened his vest and dived his hand into unseen depths for a moment.

Jimsy Curt glanced at Kent Keen, winked, and held his breath.

It took the man from Spokane some little time to reach the right spot, but he found it at last, and drew forth a long leather pocketbook, which he opened.

He took out a long slip of paper, which was yellow with age and slightly creased.

It looked like it had been carried for years next the big man's heart, and like it had gone through both flood and fire.

"That's what Mohave gave Desert Dan," said William Swift, as he laid the paper before the Gotham detective. "That's the promise he made on the honesty of a man. There were good streaks about Mohave, but he listened to the tempter; that's all."

Both Jimsy and the detective leaned forward as the latter picked up the note and held it nearer his eyes.

It was all written, in a strong, bold hand, and the ink had not faded a trifle.

This is what the two men read:

"Ten years after date, I promise to pay to William Swift, or Broncho Bill, the sum of fifty thousand dollars, provided this note is presented by William Swift in person and exactly ten years from the date named herein. For value received.

"Signed,

"MOHAVE MERLE."

"New York, Oct. 10, 188—."

Both Keen and his friend Jimsy read the agreement over twice before they looked up.

The man from Spokane was complacently observing them.

"That's a fair agreement, isn't it?" he asked.

"It is. Desert Dan saw this note drawn up, did he?"

"He did—in Mohave's elegant library. Mohave wanted to do the fair thing, and he wanted to give himself time to pay me in full after fixing his ward for life. That's it."

"But his other name?" asked the detective.

Broncho Bill shook his head and smiled faintly.

"That's why I've come to you," said he. "I don't know what name he lives under here. Next Saturday will be the 10th of October, and the ten years expire then. I am here with the note. Now I want to find Mohave Merle."

Once more the detective looked at the note, which had fallen from his hand.

He seemed to feel that he was at the beginning of a stirring case.

CHAPTER II.

JIMSY CURT IS THUNDERSTRUCK.

Such was the singular story told by the man from Spokane—such the mission which had brought him across the continent, and landed him in New York, a stranger in a strange place, a wild broncho turned loose among the pastures of civilization, as it were.

He realized that many changes occur in ten years; he felt that, in all probability, time had effected some change in the fortunes of Mohave Merle, his old partner, when last heard of, through Desert Dan, a nabob where nabobs were plentiful, a millionaire among the many in the great city.

Of course long before he had buried the name of Mohave.

It was not at all probable that the child whom he had adopted knew anything about his past, and it was not to be thought of for a moment that any of his acquaintances dreamed that once he was a tough of the Far West, much less a rascal who had plundered his trusting partner.

Broncho Bill went over the full history to the detective.

The afternoon waned while he told his story, and Jimsy Curt forgot that he had an evening errand down town while he listened to the fascinating narrative of adventure in the land of gold.

There was something striking about Broncho Bill, with his bronzed face and long black hair, something leonine and worthy of notice, and the simple-minded Jimsy grew to like the man while he talked with the sunlight playing on his features.

Keen promised to take up the matter at once.

He promised to begin the hunt for the lost partner, and by and by William Swift was escorted through the tangle of streets to a quiet little hotel where he would be safe from observation.

The detective saw that the man from the West should not make himself too conspicuous.

He carried an important document.

The note for fifty thousand dollars was carefully inspected again, and at last Keen was alone.

By and by Jimsy Curt came back.

"He's worth his weight in gold," averred Jimsy, as he threw himself into a chair and cocked his heels upon the edge of the table. "You should have seen him throw the big Irishman into the middle of the street."

"When?"

"On our way down. It was this way, and it was a caution to see him. We saw a little crowd on the corner near the square just this side of the hotel, and the moment we came up Spokane sized it up in a jiffy. A big Irishman was abusing a little pale-faced woman, his wife. All at once Spokane landed right in front of Mike, and before the lubber could speak he was in the middle of the street looking at the dirt. It was quicker'n lightning, and d'e next minute he was walking off jes' as if that was a common every-day affair with him."

"He wasn't stopped?"

"Stopped?" cried Jimsy. "Who'd stop that lion? D'e copper on d'e corner thought it would be him next, for he was letting Mike have his own way, and when Spokane looked toward him he had business 'round d'e corner. It was a daisy of a throw, and the man landed in d'e middle of d'e street like a ball."

As Jimsy ceased to laugh over the recollection of Broncho Bill's exploit, the detective leaned a little toward him and said:

"What do you think of the job?"

"It's a big contract. We can't expect to find out very much with d'e small clew he's given us, for we won't find the name of Mohave Merle in d'e directory. D'e man himself may be in Greenwood, but not under d'at name."

"We are going to try," announced the detective, quietly. "That note is to be paid if Mohave Merle's alive, and if he's dead, why, the estate may have to settle it."

"D'e ward, you mean?"

"Yes, for she evidently inherited the fortune, but the chances are that Mohave

Merle is alive. We have a week in which to unearth him. After that, according to the terms of the note, it is void, and Mohave need not pay a dollar of it."

"But what if he should hear of Bill's coming to town?" anxiously inquired Jimsy. "He knows that the time is almost up, and he may have had some one watching for the man I caught at the ferry."

"I've thought of that."

"It's plausible. A man who would rob his partner and send him out into the world as poor as Grizzle Ben is, wouldn't stop to make his note void by foul means."

"You're right, Jimsy."

"Nearly always so," put in the man in the checkered suit as he grinned. "I've got Spokane safe and snug enough in the little hotel, and if he don't break out like one of them wild Western animiles what bucks, you know, he'll be there when we want him."

"I posted him. I told him that just now secrecy meant everything to him and us in this search for Mohave Merle. He will jeopardize his own luck if he makes a break."

"He's like a tiger, Kent. I can see it in his eye; but the moment he caught Mike abusing the little woman, that same eye seemed to fill with pity for her. He'll do to tie to, will Broncho Bill, but woe to the man who tries to beat him out of his rights!"

Detective Keen had already thought of this from his study of the Westerner's face.

"When shall we begin?" asked Jimsy, after a pause.

"At once."

"What's to be d'e first move?"

"The muzzling of our Western tiger," smiled the detective. "I must assign you to that task, Jimsy."

"You want me to go down and entertain the man from Spokane?"

"That's it. He must stay indoors till I tell him he can go out. He is fresh in the city. He has never seen New York. The gaslights may fascinate him, they have fascinated thousands before him, to their sorrow. If Mohave Merle is thinking of the date of his note, and if he has changed his mind as to the payment, the man from the setting sun may be in danger."

"I'll be with him to-night."

"Go soon, Jimsy."

"I must look in upon Daisy, first."

"Don't let her keep you long from duty. The sooner you reach William Swift the better. He must remain inside the hotel for the present. Nothing must tempt him away."

Jimsy Curt arose and picked up his narrow-rimmed hat, setting it half jauntily upon his head.

"Don't let him know that you have been sent to curb his curiosity," admonished Keen. "Don't let him think that I sent you to him to guard him. The mere suspicion might render him intractable. We've got a curious man to deal with—half tiger, half human."

Once more alone in the little room where he lived and thought out the victories he won, Keen, the detective, went over the story as it had fallen from the miner's lips.

Broncho Bill had given him a splendid word photograph of Mohave Merle as he looked when he saw him last.

It was as good a picture as if the man stood before him for inspection, and not a single word of the description had been permitted to escape the ferret's observation.

Kent could imagine what a fine-looking nabob this man would make; he could realize that Mohave Merle, with all his cunning and agility, would easily fall into the ways of the rich and proud, and he believed that he would find him in the best walks of society. Ten years had doubtless taken from the man all his wild Western ways, had changed his whole nature, as it were, but there might linger about him traces of the old miner, some looks of the far-away life, and, most of all, the little scar which Swift said was to be found over his old partner's left eye.

Once a deep-seated scar, always a mark; once white and striking, always there, un-

less science could come to the man's aid and undo the work of the Indian arrow.

Jimsy Curt went down-town.

The man was a person of much natural cunning, and was trusted in every particular by the Dead-Game Detective, whom he had served for five years, as shadower, spy, decoy and aid.

He was quick of perception, cool-headed, and at all times so full of fun as to make light of even the most serious and dangerous service.

As he drew near to the little hotel in which he had installed William Swift, he became apprehensive for the safety of his charge.

He had called on a little girl of eighteen, his brother's child, and had looked after her wants, as he had promised to do, and nearly an hour had passed since quitting the detective's room when he came in sight of the Westerner's lodgings.

The lamps had been lit some time when Curt reached the place.

It was a very quiet house in a quiet neighborhood, and with but a few guests.

He had left Broncho Bill in Room 39, writing a letter to some one in the far Western city; and, thinking that perhaps he would find him at the same task, he passed through the little office and ascended the stairs.

The door of 39 stood slightly ajar.

There was a dim light burning in the room, and Jimsy made his way thither.

But the moment he touched the door to push it open something seemed to tell him that all was not right.

The next second he stood within the room.

It was deserted.

Swift was not to be seen, and Jimsy stood dazed-like in the center of the chamber.

"What's become of 'im?" he cried. "He's gone away; he's broken orders, and—and—"

Jimsy, thinking that moment of the clerk, bolted from the room and went down the steps, three at a time, and rushed up to the desk, consternation depicted in his flushed face.

"When did he go out?" asked Jimsy.

"He?—"

"D'e man what came with me a while ago. When did Mr. Swift leave d'e house?"

"Oh," said the clerk, as if suddenly recalling an ordinary incident, "I remember now. He went off in a carriage."

"In—a—carriage?"

Jimsy was stunned. The room seemed to be going around, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he steadied himself.

"No, not d'e man I came with. You must mean some one else. He was to stick to d'e house and—"

"He went off with two gentlemen in a carriage. Don't you think I ought to recollect the incident and to recall the man who came with you? There isn't another just like him this side o' the Rockies. Yes, sir; he went off with the gentlemen, and you'll have to wait till he comes back from his ride."

"But how did they find where he was?"

"I can't say. He appeared on friendly terms with them. One went up and got him, after looking over the register, and finding his name and room."

"Great God!" cried Jimsy Curt. "Trapped, and before he's been three hours in d'e city. D'ey was looking for him; d'ey knew he was coming."

"I can't say. They seemed old friends."

Jimsy was stunned.

Never before had anything happened to him like this. It was a bolt from the clear blue.

"What was d'ey like?" he asked, at last.

"I didn't pay much attention to the gentleman. One was rather tall and well dressed—the one who went up and fetched him down; the other came only to the door, and then went back to the carriage."

"Which way did they go?"

"Really, now, I didn't notice."

It was too late. The man from Spokane was gone, and the trail was lost.

Jimsy turned from the desk. His head

appeared to whirl, but at that moment, recalling the Westerner's valise, he rushed up-stairs again, into Room 39.

One glance was enough. It was gone, too!

"Now for Kent!" he cried, falling back. "This is mystery number two, and it may be d'e deepest one of all."

CHAPTER III.

TOLD BY A CHILD.

To put it mild, Mr. Jimsy Curt was considerably excited.

When he quitted the quiet little hotel from which the man from Spokane had vanished, perhaps in the hands of sharpers, if not enemies, who had been on the watch for him, his first thought was of the Dead-Game Detective.

At the same time the eager Jimsy up-braided himself, for if he had not spent so much time with Daisy, perhaps he would have reached the place in time to save William Swift.

As it was, he had come too late, and the man from the far West was gone he knew not whither.

Jimsy, for a little while, decided that the clerk of the hotel was in the plot, but the more he considered this point the less he believed it.

Broncho Bill had been tracked to the place.

There was no doubt of this, and the question which now confronted him was: Who had tracked him?

Of course Mohave Merle had a hand in the case, and in order to save the money which he had promised to turn over to his victim after a lapse of ten years, he had contrived to set a trap for that person, though, perhaps, he had not sprung it with his own hand.

Jimsy reached Kent Keen's room, but, to his dismay, found it locked.

The detective had entered upon the trail of Mohave Merle, and Jimsy tried to think where he would be apt to discover his principal.

As Jimsy went down the stairs an idea struck him, and, stopping suddenly, he threw his hand to his head.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" he exclaimed. "It's d'e very thing!"

He quickened his steps, and on the street shot off like a meteor.

Half an hour later he turned up in another part of the city, before a house which had an exceptionally quiet aspect.

Jimsy knocked, but, to his chagrin, the door did not open, and he was turning from the steps when a voice on the pavement greeted him.

"The ledly of d'at house went off yesterday."

Jimsy saw on the sidewalk a tall girl of about fourteen, with tangled hair and freckles.

"Gone?" he ejaculated.

"D'at's w'ot," was the reply. "I seed her go."

"Alone?"

"Of course. Do ye t'ink she took a brass band off with her? Where's ye'r head, man?"

Jimsy said something which the freckled lass did not understand, and the next moment he had bolted from the place, still in a fever of anxiety.

"Why not track d'e rig?" he said, suddenly.

Once more he hurried back to the quiet hotel and startled the clerk, now in a doze behind the desk, the only thing awake being his diamond stud, whose eyes flashed in the electric light.

Jimsy shook him out of his dreams.

"W'ot sort o' rig was it?" he asked.

"See here," cried the irate young man. "I ain't no photograph shop. I can't take a picter of everything that comes my way. See?"

"You've got eyes, you have. You said the rig stood outside while d'e tall man went up-stairs for Spokane. W'ot sort o' trap was it?"

"I didn't look at the color of the paint. I—I—"

"No cuteness," cried Jimsy, his long arm reaching across the counter and seizing the clerk by the shoulder. "I'll shake

yer like an airthquake if yer don't tell me the truth. You saw d'e rig, you said so, an'—"

"It was a carriage—an open one, I think, but that's as far as I can recollect."

"An' d'e man who waited? Was he tall, too?"

"Not quite as tall as the one who came in."

"Two hosses?"

"I thought I heard two."

"What color?"

Still held by the stern hand of Jimsy Curt, the hotel clerk looked at him as if he thought he was dealing with a madman.

"They were darkish horses, and the man at the carriage door seemed to be a mulatto."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jimsy. "A darky, eh?"

"He looked like it."

"But the other wasn't?"

"No; he was white like us."

Jimsy for the second time moved away, but not without hope, for he now had a little clew—a very little one, yet a clew.

He knew something about the team, and that one of the men probably was a mulatto.

Beyond this, nothing!

He felt the futility of trying to run down, in a great city like New York, a set of rascals with only such meager details in his possession, but he argued that if William Swift had been kidnapped, the kidnappers would naturally seek some secluded place in which to carry out the final play of their game, whatever that game was.

Of course it was like searching a haystack for a needle to look for Broncho Bill that night in Gotham, but for all that the search must be attempted.

Bending his head to the stiff breeze, he started for the nearest steps of the Elevated and bounded up with the agility of youth.

"I'll try d'e parks!" was his decision.

Jimsy Curt had no fear.

This was one of the traits that endeared him to the Dead-Game Detective.

With all his rich humor, at all times cropping out in his light-hearted nature, he did not know what fear was.

He was quick and courageous, and had the faculty of patience, though at times it had been sorely tried, and was to be tried again in the near future.

The man settled back into one corner of the car, and was carried up-town.

He took no notice of any one and contented himself with trying to plan the campaign out of which William Swift should come victorious and the plunderers meet their just doom.

When he reached the Park station, Jimsy sprang out and dashed down the steps.

A few late loungers were coming forth from the Park, and he heard the sound of laughter while he waited and looked at them.

But nothing of the carriage and its tenants.

Jimsy passed over to the entrance and sat down.

He took notice of all who passed, and presently he found that he was not the sole occupant of the settee.

A little girl had stolen to the end of it and was gazing at him with a question in her eyes.

Jimsy looked over at her a moment, and then turned away once more.

She was one of the waifs of the great city—one of the hundreds of night larks who steal from the nearest poor tenements at dark, hoping to pick up in the Park anything that might have fallen from the hands of the rich during the day.

Mr. Curt had seen these little night birds before.

"I say, mister," suddenly piped a child's voice. "Did you ever see a man put into a sack?"

At first Jimsy did not appear to hear the child, for at that moment a rig dashed by.

The little waif sidled over to his end of the benen.

Her long, skeleton-like fingers touched his arm and she put her face nearer his.

"Did you, mister—ever see two men put another into a long bag an' d'en hustle him into a carriage?"

Jimsy felt a thrill which he could not describe.

In another moment he had almost thrown himself upon the child and his big hand was crushing her little arm.

"W'ot's d'at?" he demanded. "W'ot's d'at you say, larkie?"

She drew back, but did not fear.

"I say, did you ever see a man hustled into a long sack?"

"No; did you, little one?"

"Didn't I? And where do you think it was?"

Jimsy, looking intently at the child, shook his head.

"It was right in d'is park—right in d'is place, where d'e coppers are supposed to see all d'at goes on. But d'ey don't see, with all d'ere sharpness. D'ey don't see one half, mister."

"Not if they put men into bags, they don't," said Jimsy. "Did you see it done?"

"I did, an' it made me hold my breath till I hardly got it again. As my name's Susie Tangle, may I never see d'e like any more."

Jimsy now urged the child to tell her story, and drew closer to her for that purpose.

"It was over there," began the little one, pointing away with her finger. "I was in d'e Park lookin' for what had been dropped, when all at once I heard a rig comin'. I got down near d'e bushes and see'd d'e rig come right close an' in it was four men."

"Four, Susie? Why, when it left d'e hotel—"

"Yes, four men," repeated the little narrator. "It stopped within a few feet o' me, an' three o' d'em got out. D'en I saw d'at d'e other man had been tied with ropes, for he couldn't move till d'e others pulled him out. I could see that he had long hair, and that they had put a handkerchief in his mouth. They took him from d'e carriage an' one o' d'em produced a long sack, into which they began to put d'e tied man, feet first."

"One o' d'e men stood nigh d'e carriage an' give orders in a low tone, but d'e others went on workin' as if d'ey didn't hear 'em. I couldn't move, mister, for my heart was in my throat, an' I was afear'd to wink. By an' by d'ey got him into d'e sack, which one o' d'e men tied, an' d'en it was hustled back into d'e carriage. D'e whole thing seemed to last an hour, but it couldn't have been d'at long. As d'e last man got in d'ey whipped up d'e horses an' away d'ey went that way."

The reader may imagine the effect of this startling story upon Jimsy Curt.

He had not missed a word of the child's narrative, and now he looked away without speaking.

His worst fears had been realized.

William Swift had fallen into the talons of the vultures!

Suddenly he caught the little one's arm again.

"Where did it happen? Come, show me, Susie," he cried.

He dragged the little girl from the settee and set off with her toward the spot.

Susie's feet did not seem to touch the ground, and once or twice she glanced up into Jimsy's face as if she doubted his sanity.

"D'ere's fifty thousand at stake!" cried Jimsy, answering her look. "You've furnished me with d'e clew; now you must show me d'e place."

He let her walk at last, and in a few moments she stopped and pointed at the ground.

It was quite dark there, and the would-be ferret stooped and looked closely.

"Here's where d'ey put him into d'e sack," averred Susie.

Jimsy got down and struck a match which he held close to the ground.

All at once he uttered a cry and picked up something that glittered.

He held it toward the child.

"It's a sparkler," cried Susie Tangle.

Jimsy smiled and put the diamond into his pocket, after which he rose and threw the match away.

He had found something. A clew? Time would tell.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOTHAM DETECTIVE'S HUNT.

Meantime Kent Keen, the Dead-Game Detective, had begun his search for Mohave Merle.

Shortly after sending Jimsy back to the quiet little hotel for the purpose of keeping William Swift indoors, he locked his office and went down upon the street.

The strange but fascinating story of the fifty-thousand-dollar note signed ten years previous by Mohave Merle was uppermost in his mind, and he recalled it and all its details as he walked away.

He turned up some distance from the office, and looked in upon a man who smiled to see him.

This person was about forty, with a keen pair of eyes, but with a sinister cast of countenance.

Tenderloin Tom was a well-known character, and Kent Keen had more than once gone with him for certain information, of which he always seemed to have a supply.

Tom greeted the man-taker with a bow, after which he gave him that cold, peculiar smile of his, and then, folding his arms, he leaned back in his chair with his feet upon the edge of the table, while he blew several smoke-rings toward the ceiling.

This man—this old resident of the Tenderloin—was a living directory. He seemed to know everybody connected with that famous district, though at times he would refuse to disclose anything, and the acumen of such a shrewd man as Kent was not sufficient to draw him out.

"Tom," said the detective, after a few words of greeting, "did you ever hear of Mohave Merle?"

The half-closed eyes of Tenderloin Tom opened, and for a moment he gave the other a singular look.

"That's not a city name," said he. "That's from the far West, I take it. It's Rocky Mountain."

"Perhaps—Rocky Mountain or the deserts," remarked the detective; "but the name, Tom? You never heard of it?"

Tenderloin Tom shook his head.

"What's up now?" he asked.

"A little matter which interests me; I want the man."

"Mohave Merle," repeated Tom; "when did he come to New York?"

"I can't tell you."

"But he's here, I s'pose?"

"I think so. He was, ten years ago."

In an instant the man from the Tenderloin came nearer the detective and, removing the cigar from his lips, he held it almost at arm's length.

"What's he worth?" he demanded.

"You mean to have him found, Tom?"

"Exactly."

"A good deal. In the first place, there's a fifty-thousand-dollar note which he will have to cash if found within a week."

"And after a week?"

"He won't have to pay it, according to the terms; the note is then disqualified."

Tenderloin Tom passed his hand through his hair and twisted his mustache thoughtfully.

"It's fifty thousand or nothing? I see," he said. "Well, if you're in it, Keen, I want it to be fifty thousand."

"Thanks, Tom; but just now, you see, I'm at sea, for I don't know what this man's other name is. All I have to go by is the signature he placed upon the note, and that is Mohave Merle."

"Not much, that's a fact, for men don't keep such names in New York. But, I say, what's he like, or what did he look like when he executed that paper?"

The detective related as much of Broncho Bill's story as he cared for Tom to know, and the man listened so attentively that his cigar went out.

At times he did not seem to breathe, so earnest was his attitude, and when the detective concluded, he said:

"There's the scar. Scars generally stay."

Kent Keen nodded.

"It's as hard to get rid of 'em as it is of a creditor. I've tried it."

The detective knew this well enough.

"Over the left eye? Now, I've seen scars in my time, in the Tenderloin and

out—scars that have got their owners into trouble and scars that have helped to fortunes. But this scar will prove bad business for Mohave Merle."

"It seems to be the best clew I have."

"Do you think he flies high, Kent?"

"Mohave? He did when he executed the note. He was rich and lived in a fine house, so Desert Dan says."

"But there's the ten years," returned the sport of the old Tenderloin. "That's the stumbling block, but let me say this: I've seen a man with a scar like that though jes' now I wouldn't like to say over which eye he wore it."

"Who wore it, Tom?"

"Iran Steele."

"Who was he?"

"One of your nabobs who loved sport for sport's sake, and who rolled in wealth in the old days."

"In New York?"

"Right here in Gotham," assured Tom, with a smile. "I haven't seen him for five years, and I haven't kept track of him for seven."

"But the scar? He had one?"

"Yes, over his eye, but over which eye I can't say jes' now."

"Where did he live?"

"Up-town, and in style, too. He had, now I think of it, strange, almost brutal, ways, and he could pull a gun quicker than any man I ever see."

"Like a Westerner, eh?"

"Jes' so. I never see him do it but once, and then the room was cleared in a jiffy."

"A dispute over a game, Tom?"

"No, it wasn't that. Some one in the room at the time said something about girls, and that quick he was on his feet with a six-shooter in his hand."

"But he did not shoot?"

"No; we got away. There's no telling what he would have done, but we saved ourselves by getting outside, and when we came back he was gone. That man had a scar, and he had Western ways, too."

"He might be Mohave Merle."

"I don't know about that," demurred Tom, slowly. "I don't know. He never saw the West, that I heard of."

"But you say he was rich?"

"As rich as Croesus. And, more than that, at the time he was raising a child as his heir."

"How long ago was that?"

"About seven years."

"And his business?"

"Nothing. He was simply a rich sport, and he knew all the ropes in and out of the Tenderloin. He used to drop down into the old Golden Egg, where we congregated. Once, I remember, we fell to talking about some great mine which had been opened somewhere in the far West, and he seemed to know more than he would tell about such things."

"Could talk about mines, Tom?"

"He could. But he stopped all at once as if he was approaching forbidden ground. That afternoon he left us suddenly, and we looked at one another astonished."

"He never talked about mines again, I suppose?"

"Never. That was the last lecture in that direction," smiled Tenderloin Tom.

The Dead-Game Detective reflected a moment.

"Were you on intimate terms with Iran Steele?"

"No; no one ever was that. He never let us go that far. He knew when to push us back, and we knew enough about the man to go back when he raised the signal."

The detective was pleased with what he had heard.

He looked across the table at Tom, and asked for the location of Iran Steele's house.

This was readily given, and a mental note was made of it.

"Ten years is a long time, Kent," remarked Tom, looking over at the special, who stood at the door, his hand on the knob. "If that man gave a note and don't want to pay it, he won't. There! He is all nerve; I've seen him tried. Take care, if he turns out to be Mohave Merle!"

"I'll take care, Tom."

Once more Kent Keen was on the streets of New York and under the thousand gas lights that flared around him.

Had fortune, through Tenderloin Tom, given him a clew so soon?

Was he about to discover the man from the far West, and was he to have the pleasure of making him disgorge, after ten years?

He made his way to the district in which Tom had located Iran Steele, and toward the house where the man had lived.

It was not late.

Jimsy, no doubt, was carrying out his part of the programme by watching the man from Spokane.

Under the care of his assistant, Broncho Bill would be entertained, and those who might be lying in wait for the Western lion—if such there were—would miss their prey.

Kent neared the house designated, to find it a large, three-story structure, showing that its tenant or owner was possessed of a great deal of wealth.

It was better than its neighbors, but at that time it had a strange, woe-begone appearance.

Detective Keen looked at the name on the door-plate.

He saw the word "Steele" by the light of the nearest lamp; then he took a survey of the house itself.

As he drew off he heard steps in the hall beyond the door, and he looked back.

The door opened, and he saw a head thrust out.

It was a head surmounted by a hat already crushed over the brows, a hat with a broad rim.

This rim shaded the face so that the keen eyes of the night-hawk could not see much of it.

The man in the doorway looked up and down the street.

"It's all right," Kent heard him say, as if speaking to some one in the hall behind him.

In another moment the first man seen left the house and stood on the step.

He was followed by another; then the door was closed, and they went off together.

"Was one of those men Iran Steele?" asked Kent of himself. "The taller one might be from Swift's description, but—"

He was interrupted by the sudden opening of the same door, and out upon the steps sprang a woman.

She stopped there like one in abject terror.

Kent Keen turned back, for the two men had already passed around the nearest corner.

"You! Come quick," cried the woman, catching sight of the man on observation. "Let them go for the present. Come to his assistance!"

A strange summons, but the detective did not hesitate; he sprang up the steps, she opened the door, and he bounded into the house, but in the hall he stopped and looked into her white face.

"He is up-stairs, in his room! He has just been murdered! I am Myrtle Steele. For God's sake, go up!"

The detective sprang up the steps.

CHAPTER V.

THE EDGE OF A LIFE SECRET.

Detective Keen halted at the top of the flight and looked over his shoulder to see if the girl was coming.

She was halfway up the flight, and her face, as he could see by the light, was white and tensely drawn.

"To the left," cried Myrtle. "The half-open door in that direction. They have left him there."

The ferret turned and sprang down the corridor toward a door that stood slightly ajar.

The room beyond was revealed by the gas jet there, and in another moment he was upon the scene of a tragedy.

In the middle of the chamber and on his face on the carpet lay a man.

The body was large and athletic, the hands quite giant-like, like those William Swift had given to Mohave Merle in his

word photograph of his missing partner, and the detective took particular notice of this in the first glance he gave the prostrate man.

So far as the detective could see by a rapid look around the room, nothing in it had been disturbed.

It was an elegant bedroom, the furniture of which was in keeping with the appointments of the hall below.

Keen bent over the man on the floor.

He turned the face so he could look into it, and saw that it was that of a person of near fifty.

But he saw more than this; he observed over the left eye a mark, at which he looked the second time.

A half-healed cut, a scar which appeared ready to open upon touch.

The man still breathed.

Kent picked him up, despite his weight, and carried him across the room to the bed.

Myrtle, the girl, had not yet come in.

He did not stop to think where she was, nor what he might be doing.

In a little while the eyes opened, and he saw that they were gray and penetrating.

This man had an eye like a hawk and the glance of the eagle.

"Where are they?" asked the strange one.

The detective bent over him and asked whom he referred to; then, without waiting for him to answer, he told him that "they" were gone.

"It was a close call," continued the big man. "It was the closest one I ever had. They thought they had finished me."

"Who thought so?"

He sat up in bed, and for the first time seemed to realize that he was in the presence of a stranger.

At that moment Myrtle bounded into the room.

"Who is he?" asked the man on the bed, pointing toward the detective.

Myrtle shook her head.

"Where did he come from?"

"From the street. I saw him when I followed them to the door, and I called to him."

The other turned his gaze slowly upon Keen, and the gray eyes seemed to look him through.

"You can go," he said. "Myrtle and I can get along now."

But Detective Keen was not in the humor to quit the house just then. He believed that he stood face to face with the very man he wanted—Mohave Merle.

"Show him the way, girl," he said, to Myrtle. "You no doubt came in through the best of motives, but I can get along without you, sir."

"Wait," said Kent. "You should not dismiss this matter so lightly. You were assaulted by those men."

"What of it?"

"You were left for dead on the floor yonder."

"Granted. What does that concern you?"

"This is a matter for the authorities."

"For—the devil!" roared the other, slipping from the bed and striding across the room. "My house is my castle, and I rule here. I am far from dead. I am the liveliest corpse in New York."

"But they wanted your life."

"Is it the first time a man's life has been wanted in this city? Is it the first attempt to shut off one's wind?"

"No."

"Then I am no better than others who have felt the steel of the assassin who has lived to rue his failure. Myrtle, this gentleman will quit the house now."

The wary Kent Keen, biting his lips beneath his mustache, looked at the giant before him, and a smile lurked at the corners of his mouth.

"Don't hurry me off," he protested. "I may have been looking for you."

"For me? You? What business have you with me?"

"More than you suspect, perhaps. I am glad to have found you, Mohave Merle."

There was a quick quivering of the facial muscles before the cool detective, but the next moment their possessor was as cool as a cucumber.

"I don't know such a person," he averred. "What did you call me?—Mohave Merle? That snaps of the mining camp or the mountains, but it is out of place here. I don't know the man, sir."

Never spoke a cooler person than that man who stood before the detective and emphasized what he believed to be a deliberate lie.

"Very well," said the detective. "Those men knew that you were Mohave Merle."

"It is false! Come here, Myrtle."

The fair girl—she was beautiful and regal in form—went toward him, and he put out his hands and drew her still closer.

"You have just heard this man. He called me Mohave Merle. Tell him who I am."

Still resting her hands in his, Myrtle turned upon the city ferret, and a flush swept over her face.

"This is my father, Iran Steele," she exclaimed. "He is not the man whose name you have just spoken. That is a name I have never heard in all my life. He is not Mohave Merle, but Iran Steele. He has never been beyond the boundaries of the East, therefore he could not have borne the name which, as he says, smacks of the Wild West and its lawless life."

"The child never lies," proudly asserted Steele, as he looked over the girl's shoulder into the face of the detective. "Perish the thought that I should deceive her! She is Myrtle, the child of my heart and the image of her sainted mother. You will go now, won't you?"

Against such an appeal what could the detective do?

"If you are looking for Mohave Merle," continued Iran Steele, "let me advise you to look elsewhere."

As he spoke, a strange pallor swept over the speaker's face, which grew deathly white in an instant.

He suddenly tottered toward the bed, and Myrtle, falling from him with a half-suppressed cry, looked toward the ferret for assistance.

Kent Keen leaped forward and reached the tottering man before he could strike the couch.

He threw out his hands and caught him quickly.

"He is dying!" cried Myrtle. "After all, they must have struck him."

Once more the detective lowered Iran Steele upon the bed and turned upon the girl.

She stood in the middle of the room with her hands clasped and her white face the very picture of terror.

"Where is your doctor?" asked the ferret.

"Just around the block. Remain with him. I'll go."

The disappearance of the girl left the detective alone with the now unconscious man.

Keen opened his garments and exposed the white skin of the breast.

There was a faint beating of the heart, and the eyes were closed.

Over the left eye gleamed the red scar, redder than ever when compared to the whiteness—the deathly pallor of the rest of the face.

"This is the man," muttered the ferret of New York. "This man is Mohave Merle, no matter what he says."

Seconds seemed minutes while he waited for the return of Myrtle, accompanied by a doctor.

At last he heard voices below, and the following minute the doctor came in.

The girl trod at his heels, but stopped at the door, and with one look went off.

"There's your patient, doctor," said the detective. "You've known him some years, haven't you?"

Doctor Burrows looked at the speaker, but did not answer the question as he drew near the bed.

A hasty examination seemed enough, and the man of medicine looked up after having listened to Iran Steele's heart.

"I have known him for ten years," he said, turning upon the detective and measuring his words. "I have known him intimately during most of that time. His name is Iran Steele. He never had another name, nor a nickname."

Detective Keen seemed to smile, but the doctor did not notice it.

"Myrtle has talked with him on the way," thought Kent. "She has posted him; I see it. The secret of his identity is to be kept at all hazards; but we shall see."

Then he addressed the doctor.

"What are his chances?" he asked.

"Very slim."

"You don't give her much hope?"

"I cannot."

"She must have told you. He was assaulted. I found him on his face on the floor yonder. I thought him dead till I turned him."

Doctor Burrows nodded; that was all.

"I must say that I would be alone with my patient," he said, bowing slightly.

"Certainly. But you must remember that this is a thing for the police."

"How for the police?" cried the tall doctor, as he lost a little color about the mouth. "Who are you—a detective?"

"No matter what my calling is; this matter may not end thus."

Doctor Burrows turned to the bed and seemed to forget that he was not the only person in the room with the man there.

Keen took another look in that direction and walked toward the open door.

As he crossed the threshold the door was shut by the doctor's hand, and he was at the top of the stair.

"Mohave Merle he is for a cool thousand," muttered Kent Keen. "I have found the man who gave the fifty-thousand-dollar note, and if he lives he shall pay it."

With this he moved down the steps and was in the short hall at the foot of the flight.

He was advancing toward the front door when he heard a cry at his left and Myrtle stood before him.

"One moment," cried the girl, laying her hand upon the detective's sleeve. "He is my father. He is Iran Steele, and the man who told you that he is Mohave Merle deliberately lies."

Her manner was strained and excited and her face was bloodless, but her voice did not quaver, and her nerves were firm.

"But he had enemies, miss?"

"Yes, yes. He has the bitterest enemies man ever had. He has been haunted for years. He has been expecting an enemy from afar off; he must have come to-night."

"No doubt of it. But, miss, the scar over his eye?"

"There! Don't speak of it. It reddens at stated seasons and at times is as white as snow. It is his life-mark, one he got—"

She stopped as if she heard a noise overhead, and she hastily glanced up the stairs.

"I will not tell you," she finished. "I don't know who you are. You may be one of his deadly foes. Remember, I never saw you before to-night. You may be one of the men he hates; you may be there! I won't mention the name."

"I may be William Swift, alias Broncho Bill? Isn't that it?"

The girl reeled from the detective as if he had thrown a serpent in her face.

"My God! who told you?" she exclaimed, and the next moment she wheeled, and, springing back into the nearest room, shut the door in the ferret's face.

CHAPTER VI.

WHERE IS BRONCHO BILL?

The startling adventure of Jimsy Curt in the Park, where he unexpectedly struck a clew to Broncho Bill's disappearance through the story of Susie Tangle, the street waif, thrilled that queer specimen of humanity.

Jimsy did not doubt the little one's narrative, and he resolved to seek the detective at once with it.

He found out first where the child lived, and then hurried from the Park.

Bound, gagged, and placed in a long sack.

That smacked of crime.

It meant that the man from Spokane had fallen into the hands of crooks, that the vultures had watched for him and had enmeshed their prey.

Jimsey conjured up all sorts of punishment for the Westerner, and doubted not that the sack with its human contents would soon be found floating in the harbor.

He could not believe otherwise, and while he pushed his way down-town under the lights he reviewed the child's story until he had it pat.

It was in this state of mind that the man arrived at Kent Keen's door and burst into the room without the formality of announcement.

The City Crook-Crusher was at home.

He had just come back from his own adventures at the home of Iran Steele, and Jimsey was the last man he expected to see in his chamber at that hour.

"It's all over with the man from Spokane!" cried Jimsey, almost falling into the first chair he encountered.

"All over with him? How so?"

"They've bagged their game—literally bagged him, sir!"

The detective looked startled.

"Didn't you find him at the hotel?"

"He was gone—gone off for a ride to death."

"Come, you must explain as you go along, Jimsey," said the detective, a little sharply. "I've met with an adventure myself, but it was a fortunate one."

"Eh? You've had an adventure? I hope you've found Mohave Merle, though I can't think what good the finding will do Spokane just now, unless fortune unties the bag and lets him out."

Kent reached over and shook Jimsey.

After a while the assistant cooled down enough to narrate his story and to tell the one which little Susie had spun.

Of course Kent Keen listened with eagerness.

"They've got him, if the girl's story is true," said the ferret. "You were too late at the hotel with no fault of your own, Jimsey."

"Thanks," said the other, who expected to be censured for his call on Daisy, his niece.

"Here's the sparkler I found on the spot," and Jimsey produced the diamond set, which must have been lost from a ring belonging to one of the participants in the scene in the Park.

Kent took it and looked at it with interest.

It was not a very clear stone, but well shaped, and at last he laid it on the table beside him.

"It may talk, later on," he remarked, with a look at Jimsey. "We'll attend to it by and by. Now for my story, Jimsey. I've found Mohave Merle."

Jimsey uttered an exclamation of joy.

"I thought you would! I knew all along that you would walk out and lay your hands on him."

"It was more an accident than design. I went to the only place where I thought I could get some information about him."

"To the old stand-by—to the man who knows all New York—Tenderloin Tom?"

Kent nodded.

"And he knew, did he?"

"He gave me the clew that found him out."

"Good for Tom, but we've lost the trump card. We've lost the man from Spokane."

"Not for good, perhaps," answered the detective, with some hope.

"But what good will a man be who's been sacked up and probably thrown into the river?"

"Not much, that's a fact, Jimsey, but it may not be that bad."

"No? Worse, perhaps. If you've found Mohave Merle he won't care to pay the note to a corpse, especially if that corpse has nothing to show that he is Broncho Bill—not even the note itself."

There was logic in Jimsey's words, and a smile appeared for a moment at the detective's lips.

"We must track those men," said the crook-crusher.

"It's a cold trail, now."

"Perhaps, but the child told you what they looked like?"

"Oh, yes. They didn't wear masks at all. The man who appeared to be at the head of the affair was the one who decoyed him from the hotel, and the dark-faced one must have been the person whom the clerk described as a mulatto."

"And the third man?"

"He looked a good deal like the boss of the job, from what Susie Tangle saw. The child was frightened, but she didn't lose her wits at all. She's as sharp as a rat and has a nose for news. You couldn't have got a better description of those men if they had been seen working on Broadway in daylight. Track them? We must or lose the game."

"You see what we've got—the description of the men and the rig. Some one else must have seen them, not in the Park perhaps, but somewhere on the street. Some one knows those three conspirators."

"One couldn't have been Mohave Merle?"

"I think not."

"What was he like?"

"He is a handsome fellow, and a cool head."

"And in clover?"

"Yes."

"Able to pay the fifty-thousand-dollar note, with interest?"

"I am sure he is."

"Then he pays it!" cried Jimsey, bringing his hand down upon the table till it seemed to crack. "He may not pay it to William Swift, for the aforesaid William may not be in a condition to receive it, but he shall pay it all the same."

Keen now figured on the time which could have elapsed between the scene in the Park and his own adventure at Iran Steele's house, and concluded that the men whom he saw quit the place might have been two of the trio who had decoyed Broncho Bill from the hotel.

If thus, why should they try to take the life of Iran Steele?

If they were in his employ, taking his gold for the kidnapping, why had they struck him down, if not taken his life, in his own house?

He said nothing to Jimsey while he revolved this startling problem in his head.

The double mystery deepened.

It grew darker while he viewed it, and at last he looked up and said:

"It's a tangle, Jimsey, a very curious tangle."

Curt twisted his stubby mustache maliciously, a habit he had when deeply puzzled.

"It beats the O'Donovan case," said he.

"And the murder in Mulberry Bend."

"It—it beats the devil!" and with this Jimsey picked up his hat, only to throw it upon the floor with emphasis and to bite off the end of a cigar half savagely.

The detective's friend walked across the room, and for a little while stood at the window looking down into the street.

Kent took up the stone and held it between him and the light.

"Jimsey," he suddenly said, and that individual turned from the window.

"I never saw a stone just like this. This is a peculiar diamond. See the little streak which zigzags through it."

He held the stone in a certain light, and Jimsey, bending over him, took notice of it, also.

"That's a stone of itself—none other jes' like it in New York. Try the shops, Kent."

"We might. But while the streak gives the stone a strange appearance, the chances are that the salesman wouldn't remember to whom he had sold it."

"But then he might. You remember the old man who recalled the woman to whom he sold that broken earring last summer simply because she had a birthmark under her jaw?"

Detective Keen looked up at his friend and nodded.

Carefully wrapping the diamond in a bit of paper, he deposited it in his pocket and left the table.

"I'll see old Josy at once," said he.

"And the rest to-morrow?"

"Yes, if he can't give me any information. You, Jimsey, can take a snooze or go out, just as you wish."

"Don't send me to watch any one else to-night. I might stroll along the piers and wait till the harbor police find the man in d'e sack."

"And you might stroll there till you're gray without being rewarded," observed the detective. "But take the time as you like. I'm off."

Keen quitted the little room and left Jimsey alone.

"D'e best hunter in d'e town. D'e man what will find who bought d'at stone if he is findable," said Jimsey, with a last look at the man in whom he trusted. "W'ot shall I do? Shall I go down to d'e river and wait for something to turn up there in d'e shape of a man in a sack? Or shall I go to bed?"

He soon decided to go to the wharves with hopes of striking the gruesome trail already struck that night, and in a short time he was on his way thither.

The streets were almost cleared of pedestrians when he left the room, and he walked rapidly, with the cool wind in his face.

Jimsey was near the river when he heard the noise of an approaching vehicle, and in another instant he had halted, with his back near a brick wall.

"Jehosaphat! w'ot a find!" he exclaimed, as the wheels rattled around the nearest corner, and brought into view a carriage which actually seemed to still the beatings of his heart.

He saw the same team which both the hotel clerk and little Susan had described to him.

It was so close that he could see the very stripes on the spokes, but this was not what he looked at.

The horses were on a slow trot, and Jimsey felt a thrill in his nerves as he noticed that the man on the box had a dark face, almost mulattoish in color.

"D'at's d'e man," he mentally said. "D'at's d'e man what waited at d'e hotel and helped to sack the man from Spokane."

As the vehicle passed, Curt forgot all about the wharves and their tenants, for the next moment he was following the carriage.

If the horses should be whipped up, as was likely, he was baffled, but the driver seemed in no haste.

Perhaps the last act of the tragedy had been accomplished.

Perhaps the man in the sack was even then in the river, and the conspirators were on their way leisurely to another part of the city, where they would drink to the success of their plans.

Jimsey ran a good deal of risk in following the vehicle as he was liable to be seen from it.

He kept in the shadows of the buildings like a true spy, and at last saw the carriage come to a halt at a night stand, where an Italian sold his nocturnal wares under the flare of his light.

"D'at's pretty cool," said Jimsey to himself.

He heard the man on the box call for a bite, and the Italian handed it up.

Jimsey drew a little closer and looked at the driver.

The man was intent on devouring the hot sausage, and seemed to be oblivious to everything passing around him.

"Why, d'e door's open!" said Jimsey, as he noticed that one of the carriage doors stood ajar. "D'e rig's empty!"

Just then a brilliant idea flashed across the man's mind.

It was a desperate one, as well, but Jimsey Curt was a cool head and liked adventure.

He glided toward the carriage; he was not seen, and at last he stood alongside.

Yes, it was empty.

In another moment his adventurous hand had pulled the door open a little more, and then, with the coolness of an old campaigner, he slipped into the dark carriage and shut the door carefully.

"Now I've got you," thought Curt. "I'll go wherever you take me, if it is to Tartarus!"

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE RIDE ENDED.

The man on the box munched his late lunch with a good deal of zest, now and then chatting with the Italian, who replied with gusto.

At last, to Jimsy's delight, the wheels moved, and he was soon being carried over the stones of New York at a smart gait.

The curtains of the carriage had been pulled down, and he did not disturb them—the termination of the journey was all he cared about.

The ride threatened to become interminable, when the vehicle was suddenly pulled up, and the man inside heard voices which convinced him that he had been carried to a livery.

The person on the box jumped down and handed the lines to the darky who came forward to take them, and in another moment started for the street.

It would never do to miss that man.

The man inside opened the door cautiously and put his head out.

"A passenger, by jove!" cried the man who saw him.

Jimsy alighted and seemed to stagger from the stable, while the colored hostler laughed.

On the sidewalk he caught sight of the driver and followed him.

It was tracking a man again, and in this Jimsy delighted. He had but to keep at a respectful distance to keep the fellow in sight, and in a little while he had tracked to what he believed was his home.

It was a large house, some squares from the stable, and Jimsy looked at it wondering if the mulatto really lived there, or had merely gone thither to make a report of some kind.

Suddenly there came to the window a face which threw the man of trails off his guard.

He saw the hand of some one pull the curtains aside, and just as this was done he noticed the handsome face of a tallish man.

A dark mustache crowned the upper lip, and Jimsy saw that the eyes were keen and penetrating.

The man was looking out, and for some little time he let the unseen spy take a good look at him.

"The master of the house—the man what decoyed Broncho Bill from Room 39," said Jimsy to himself, as the face vanished.

As the curtains fell back, and the face disappeared, Jimsy Curt slipped up to the window.

He was in the shadows again, and the window was on a level with his shoulders.

He put one ear against the pane and listened.

There were voices inside.

What was a hum at first grew into coherency, and by and by the detective's spy was hearing something which thrilled him.

"It was the easiest thing we ever undertook, Chocolate," said a voice.

"It couldn't have been easier. Everything played right into our hands, and it was a success."

"In every way. If we had missed that man the deuce might have been to pay."

"It would have ruined us. That man might have fallen into the hands of the police."

"Not when I was on the lookout for him. Come here."

Jimsy, burning to see as well as hear, was baffled.

He heard some one cross the floor, but could not see him.

"This is the paper, worth its weight ten times over in diamonds to us," said the first speaker. "See the creases in it? He must have carried it through all those ten years, no matter where he went. He kept it as he would keep his head."

"It's the note, sure enough. He had it with him like a miser."

"Of course. It was his stock in trade. It was the thing which lured him from the mines to New York."

Jimsy's heart seemed to stand still in his bosom.

He had found the conspirators as Kent Keen had discovered Mohave Merle, so the detective had nothing to brag of.

Both men in the room laughed over the success of their play. They congratulated one another upon it, and, as Jimsy thought, drank over the game.

"Shall we burn it?" asked one of the couple.

"No. It's good enough to keep."

"Why, he didn't sign his right name to it," exclaimed the driver of the carriage.

"He was Mohave Merle to William Swift."

"Certainly. That's where he would have concealed his identity from Broncho Bill. It was a cute move."

"But just like the man."

"Yes."

Jimsy now drew back, for footsteps came suddenly toward the window, and as he fell away the curtains were parted and he looked up into the face of the handsome man.

He saw it better now; he saw that it was the fine face which little Susie had seen in the Park, and the same one seen by the clerk of the quiet hotel.

Truly, he was in luck that night.

Detective Keen's right bower did not seem to breathe while he eyed the man at the window.

"Bijou will be in presently," said he. "You left him at the office, Chocolate?"

"Yes. He'll come soon."

Once more the curtains dropped, and Jimsy sprang back to his post, but at the same time a thrill passed to his heart.

The other man was still out.

The third master-plotter was still on the streets, and he would have to use his eyes while he listened.

All at once Jimsy heard a footstep behind him, and turned like a startled man.

A man was already upon him.

There was a spring which would have done justice to a tiger, and before the man underneath the sill could throw out a hand to ward off his doom, he was crushed against the bricks, and it seemed to him that his bones were being driven through his body into the wall.

All this was the work of a second, and Jimsy felt a pair of talon-like hands at his throat, while two eyes glared at him with the ferocity of a hyena's.

The brief struggle at the window drew the attention of those in the house to it.

Again the curtains parted and the same face touched the pane.

One look seemed enough, for Jimsy heard an exclamation, and then had a faint recollection of hearing a door open and shut.

Some one ran from the house and jumped off the steps; he came to the help of the spy's assailant, and in the twinkling of an eye, as it seemed, Jimsy was carried inside.

"Blindfold him," said a voice, in tones of command. "Quick! Chocolate!"

This was speedily done, as Jimsy could not resist, and as the dark silk handkerchief tightened over his eyes, he was pushed into a chair and rough hands straightened him against the back of it.

"You didn't hurt him, I hope."

"No. I only pushed him against the wall and held him there. He's not hurt."

The next moment a hand fell upon Jimsy's shoulder and rested there a brief spell.

"What's your name, man?"

Jimsy shut his lips hard and said nothing.

"Come, it won't do you any good to keep silence in this house. It will be against you."

No reply.

"You were at the window. You were playing spy?"

"That's where I found him," broke in another voice. "He was listening with his face glued to the glass. He was playing spy."

"You hear the charge. Was it on your own hook?"

"On my own hook, of course," said Jimsy, at last.

"Why did you play spy?"

"That's my business."

"It's ours, too, my man. It is just as much our business as it is yours."

Jimsy's lips came together again.

"Stand over there, Chocolate," said the first speaker, who seemed to be the man

with the fine face. "We must silence this man."

"That's the only true way out of it," said another. "Dead men never betray any one."

At this Jimsy Curt started from the chair, but as he arose he was seized and his arms were pressed against his sides.

Once he broke from his persecutors and struck out blindly in the wrong direction, the blow smiting but air and drawing from the three men derisive laughs.

He was then seized by all three and in a jiffy his arms were pinioned to his sides with cords and once more he was forced to occupy the chair.

It all seemed up with Kent Keen's right bower.

"He'll speak now, I know he will," said one of the trio. "You were not playing the spy's game wholly for yourself."

"I have told you," said Jimsy.

"You will be dead in five minutes if you continue to deceive us. You will be food for the fishes—"

"Like William Swift, eh?"

Jimsy heard the three start.

Perhaps he had spoken too fast.

He should have kept his secret a while longer, but the cat had been let out of the bag.

"What's that? Who's William Swift?" cried a voice, and a hand fell upon the prisoner's shoulder.

"You ought to know," answered Jimsy.

"Pull the light down here, Chocolate. Bring it close to this man's face. There."

The heat caused the spy to wince, but for some time he did not speak.

"You can't roast out of me what I know," he said, doggedly. "You might as well give up in that direction."

The burner was removed.

"For the last time, what did you see to-night?"

"Find out."

"Tie him to the chair, boys."

Jimsy was tied to the chair and a cord which seemed to cut into the flesh of his lower limbs bound his feet to the legs of the chair.

"You will not tell, eh?"

"I will not."

A silence of a few seconds followed, and then the seat was suddenly lifted and Jimsy felt himself borne away.

A door opened and shut and he felt a draft of cool air on his cheeks.

He was carried down a corridor and thence down some steps, how many he could not tell.

When the journey ended the chair was placed on the ground and he was alone.

He listened and heard the men steal from the chamber; he heard also a key click in an unseen lock and then all was silence as before.

Poor Jimsy!

If he had not ridden to Tartarus, he had ridden to doom.

For some time he sat still in what he supposed must be an underground chamber, then began to twist at his bonds.

But the more he did so the deeper they seemed to cut into his flesh and the more pain he had.

By and by he twisted off the blindfold, but darkness still hemmed him in.

The surface of the floor seemed level, and he managed to move the chair forward.

Suddenly it brought up against a wall, and there his trip ended.

"This beats anything I ever got into," said the man to himself. "This is a trap w'ot holds, an' it seems to me d'at I'm in it for keeps. I've found d'e men who took Broncho Bill on his death ride and they've found me, too."

He now moved the chair along the wall till he found a corner, and by keeping to the left, at last discovered the door, which was locked.

The touch of this door seemed to arouse all the strength in the man's muscles.

He arose, despite his bonds.

He dashed himself against the door, and the next moment he fell headlong into space, for the portal had yielded to the singular assault, and Jimsy, chair, and all, was sprawling on another floor.

The tiger had broken from his cage.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ANGEL OF THE KNIFE.

For some time the man lay in the darkness, immovable.

He was so securely fastened in the chair as to have no use of his limbs, and while he lay there he expected at any moment to have his enemies down upon him.

But as the moments swept by without bringing them into the gloomy place, he began to conclude that his onset had not been heard, or that the trio had left the house.

It was a ludicrous position for Jimsy Curt, and he could not help seeing the funny side of it.

"W'ot if I am to lie here an' rot?" he said to himself as the full terror of his situation took possession of his mind. "W'ot if Jimsy Curt is to be entombed in this place like the old Egyptians, never to be found out for years to come? W'ot a fine mummy I'd make, to be sure."

He twisted with his bonds, but they only seemed to tighten, and at last he gave up for lost.

"It's no use. I'm at d'e end of my trail an' Kent will never think of lookin' for me in this old trap. But I found 'em all d'e same. I found d'e men who tolled William Swift from d'e hotel an' bagged him in d'e Park."

Silence had settled over the scene, and Jimsy was again sitting bolt upright in the heavy chair, which he had righted with difficulty.

An hour passed.

He heard street sounds, but they seemed so distant as to be barely discernible.

The conspirators had undoubtedly gone out.

If in the house they would make some noise by which he could locate them with some certainty, but not a sound seemed to come to his ears from any part of the place.

Strange to say, the prisoner of the chair fell asleep in his uncomfortable position.

Nature asserted herself, and Jimsy's head was pillowed on one shoulder and he passed into the land of dreams.

He was awakened suddenly by a noise which seemed to come from a point quite near, and as he raised his head he heard the shutting of a door.

Had the three come back, and would they come down the corridor and find him almost at the threshold of liberty?

After some time the door was opened somewhere in the house, and then Jimsy saw a streak of light at the end of the corridor.

It shone under a door there and lay on the floor in a long streak of red.

"They'll find me in a minute," said the captive. "I'll be hustled back into d'e dungeon and—"

The door opened at that moment, and the sight which met the man's gaze startled him and drew from his lips an irrepressible cry.

A slender female figure confronted him.

The young girl—she was not more than this, as he could see by her face—stood in the doorway for a moment, as if hesitating to venture into the hall.

She had not caught sight of the man in the chair, but her roving eye was liable to see him at any moment.

There was nothing about her which threatened the prisoner with betrayal.

Her face was thin and white, and her hands, which rested on the wall near by, were faultless.

"She sees me," mentally ejaculated Jimsy. "Shall I call her?"

He settled that question in his mind in an instant, for he spoke.

"I can't hurt ye, miss," said he. "I'm tied to this chair, an'—"

The girl had started forward and was looking at him in the light which streamed into the hall from the room behind her.

"Who are you? Tied? So you are. In Heaven's name, who did this?"

"Don't you know?"

She seemed afraid to answer him, for her face first flushed, and then turned deathly pale again.

"You ought to know, miss, or you would not be here," repeated Jimsy.

"Don't ask me. You want to be loose. I know you do. Shall I free you?"

"If you're not afraid to. I want to get out o' this chair, for I wasn't brought up to be tied long in this manner."

"Wait."

She ran back into the room and soon returned with a knife in her hand.

"They won't like it, eh?" said Jimsy, looking up into her face as she seemed to pause.

"What do I care? They've treated me bad enough already, and I want to pay them back a little."

"You know them?"

The girl's eyes seemed to flush.

"Don't I?" and she ended with a knowing laugh. "Don't I know them all?"

The knife now found the main cord, and in a jiffy it was cut, and Jimsy Curt, with an exclamation of victory, arose to his feet and held out his half-stiffened hand.

"Count on me till d'e day of jedgment!" he cried. "I'll stand by you, miss, till d'e Hudson runs dry."

"Then you'll be my friend a long time," smiled the other, at which Jimsy nodded exultantly.

"This'll get you into trouble, won't it?" he asked.

"I'll risk that. He needn't find out who did it."

"The leader of the three men, you mean?"

"Roland Rash."

"Ho! that's his name, is it?"

"Didn't you know before?"

"Not exactly," said Jimsy, stretching the truth a little. "That is, I thought it might be something of the kind."

She looked at him curiously, and then went to the front door, where she paused.

"You're going out, aren't you? You don't want to stay here till he comes back?"

"I should say not," exclaimed the detective's right-hand man. "I have had my fill of adventure in this house for the present. When I come again—"

"I may not be here to cut you loose," broke in the girl, with a faint smile. "You must be careful."

She opened the door at this, and Jimsy slipped to the step, where he paused and looked gratefully into his deliverer's face.

"I don't know who you are. I don't want to if the telling of your name might get you into future trouble. I'm Jimsy Curt, though, and if you want me at any time you'll find me here."

He reached in his pocket for one of the cards which he usually carried, but a comical expression overspread his face when his hand touched nothing.

"They robbed you, did they?" asked the girl.

"They touched me a little, but we'll fix that. You're blessed with a good memory, so you'll find me at—"

"No, no; not the old address, if he's got it."

"That's right, girl. If you ever want Jimsy Curt come to Room 10, No. — Park Row, and ask for Jimsy, if I ain't in. He'll be there."

"Your room mate?"

"My partner," said Jimsy. "The best detective in New York."

At this the girl fell back with a sharp little cry and clasped her hands.

"He's all right," Jimsy hastened to put in. "You don't know him, but you may want to some day."

"I hope not. I don't like these people."

"But you'd like Kent."

"They've robbed me."

"The detectives, miss?"

She did not speak.

"Kent Keen never did. He's the pink o' perfection, an' the friend of the poor and needy, but at the same time he's the eternal enemy of the guilty. See?"

"A good man, no doubt, but you'd better go. They may come back."

"But you?"

"Oh, I'll take care of that," she laughed. "I know how to take him. Good-night, sir."

She held out her hand and Jimsy took it as for the tenth time he thanked her for her timely interference.

In another moment he was on the street.

Help had come at an opportune time, and in an unexpected manner.

He might never see his deliverer again, and he recalled her apparent helplessness as he thought of her.

She knew the three men.

Their names and deeds must be known also to her, and she could give him and Kent Keen the very clew they wanted.

Perhaps she shared their secrets.

Perhaps she could have told him about William Swift and given him a clew to his fate.

Why hadn't he pressed the inquiry?

"I'll find out, after all. I know them now, for I've seen them. Not only this, but I know that one is Roland Rash, one Chocolate, and the third Bijou. This is a starter. It's something tangible, but, then, it doesn't unearth Broneho Bill."

Jimsy Curt went back to the detective's room, to find it locked and its tenant gone.

As he half expected this, he turned away and started home.

No, they stole my cards and they know where I roost," said he. "If they find the chair empty they will come to the nest after me, for I know too much for the gang."

He turned down the next street and quickened his gait.

It was now past midnight, and the thoroughfares of Gotham were nearly deserted.

Jimsy had another safe place; he could go to Daisy's home, and there rest till morning, secure from the arts of the plotting three.

The girl let him in at once, and he bade her ask him no questions till morning as he mounted the stairs to a little room which he had occupied before when hard pressed by other foes.

It was a long night for the detective's right bower.

With the first streaks of light he got up and waited till he heard Daisy moving in the room below.

"You've got ears like a cat, girl," he said to his little niece. "Did you hear anything after I came in last night?"

Daisy shook her head.

In the light of morning Jimsy stood on the street and looked toward the river with startling thoughts.

He wondered if the harbor patrol had found the man in the sack—if they had pulled from the dark waters of New York the last victim of crime and the last witness against them.

He bolted off toward Kent's room again.

"I'll take a quick route," said Jimsy to himself. "I'll run through Midnight Alley."

He dodged down a narrow alley, which would bring him out upon a street in a few moments and near the home of Kent, the ferret.

But all at once Jimsy Curt stopped, and then looked at a figure which lay on a doorstep in the heart of the alley.

It was the doubled-up body of a woman, and the early morning light seemed to search it out for the purpose of letting his eye light upon it.

Something about the dress startled Jimsy.

He bent over the figure, which he reached in a bound, and raised the head.

"It's her!" he exclaimed, almost dropping the head. "It's the girl who cut me from d'e chair last night!"

Then, with the body in his arms, he arose and knocked at the door before him.

He thundered there like one storming a castle, and at last heard footsteps beyond.

The door was opened by a crone, who looked twice at Jimsy to once at his burden; then the door was slammed in his face.

"W'ot's d'at—don't own her, eh?" cried the big-hearted detective-spy. "I'll see if you don't."

He kicked the door open and strode into the hall, where he was confronted by the crone.

"Don't fetch her in here!" shrieked the woman. "I don't have anything to do with her since she went off with Roland Rash."

"But she's your child, isn't she?"

"She was—"

"Then you'll take care of her, or I'll break every bone in your old body. I'm

d'e tiger of d'e Bowery. See?" And Jimsy thrust the unconscious girl into the woman's arm, forcing her to carry her down the hall and into a poorly-furnished room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE END OF A LIFE.

Having had the satisfaction of leaving the girl who had befriended him in the hands of her mother, even though that being was somewhat relentless, Jimsy Curt once more pursued his way.

If he could have turned back to the house in which he had had his startling adventure in the prisoner's chair he might have stood face to face with one of his persecutors.

In the luxuriously-furnished room to the right of the hall stairs was the man known as Roland Rash.

He was the sole occupant of the place, and the fragrant smoke of a long cigar drifted ceilingward while he ran his hands through a little heap of various things piled up on the table.

Over in one corner of the same room lay half open a valise which had seen some travel, and the man seemed to have flung it thither after relieving it of its contents.

"It was luck, downright luck, that we trapped him when we did," said Roland to himself, in audible tones, as if he addressed some one at his elbow. "But it's all right now if Chocolate carries out his part of the programme. We can depend on Chocolate. We can depend on Bijou as well, and the spy—we have him safe enough."

The spy!

The thought of Jimsy seemed to rouse the man, for he pushed back the chair and crossed the room.

He passed to the end of the hall beyond and then into a dark place which needed a light.

He struck a lucifer on the wall at his right and held the growing flame above his head.

All at once he fell back with a cry, and then stood as if transfixed with horror.

A broken door and an empty chair confronted him, and the gaze of Roland Rash was riveted upon these things for some time.

"Gone! And after what we did to him?" he exclaimed. "Gone, and to give us trouble!"

He approached the spot with a second match and looked at the severed cords a moment.

"A knife has been here. He found a friend who released him. He is not our prisoner any longer. Who did this? Where is the traitor?"

Echo did not answer his questions, and after a while he went back to the room.

But this time he did not sit down.

Picking up the papers on the table, he touched a button in the wall and deposited them in a little hole, after which he tossed the valise into a wardrobe, which he locked.

"I'll see," was all he said, as he turned away, and in a short time he was on the street.

Roland Rash did not take a car.

He did not care to trust himself on board such a public conveyance, but bolted off to turn up a few minutes later in a house, where he knocked at a door.

"Yes, sir," said a voice beyond, and when the door opened and he stood in front of a man whose face was almost as dark as a mulatto's.

Roland saw the look of wonderment which came to the man's eyes as he crossed the threshold, but he did not speak till he was fairly in the room.

"The cage is empty!" he exclaimed.

The dark face got a look of surprise.

"Gone? Not the man in the chair?"

"No one else."

"When did you discover it?"

"Just now. The chair is empty and the ropes cut."

"The deuce! Who—"

"That's what I'm here to ask you," broke in Roland. He couldn't have freed himself."

"That man? Impossible! He was as firmly held in that chair as though nailed

to it, so far as self-liberation was concerned."

"But the severed ropes? They lay on the floor at the foot of the chair. The door had been broken down from the inside."

"Oh," said Chocolate, "he might have thrown himself against the portal and got into the hallway for that matter, but that wouldn't cut the cords."

"Of course not."

A moment's silence fell between the two men, and the face of Roland Rash became a study.

"We had him fast, you see. We hold that game in our hands with that spy out of the way. We have the note, and the man from the far West is all right."

"And Iran?"

"Oh, he's fixed, too. It was in our hands, you see."

"Yes. Curse the foul luck!"

"No. Curse the person who set him free!"

Chocolate's face underwent a thoughtful change, and all at once his hand fell upon Roland's arm.

"I'll tell you, captain," said he. "Could it have been the girl?"

"Ortiz?"

"Yes. You know how she has felt toward you for some time."

"I know; but I can't think that it was her work."

"It was not Bijou's?"

"No."

"Nor mine?"

"Of course not, Chocolate."

"And he couldn't have cut the ropes himself?"

"That were impossible."

"Then, after all, we have to fall back on the girl as our nemesis."

"Perhaps you are right, Chocolate. If so, woe to the meddling hussy."

"You remember what she whispered to you the other night on the street?"

"I do. But at the time I thought nothing of it. I see it all now. It was her work. You know where to find her, Chocolate?"

"Yes, if she went thither afterward."

"Go and see. Now is the time. It is just day. She will be dreaming of her revenge, and you can fall upon her like a hawk upon the dove, but first on your way down you might drop in—you know where."

Chocolate shrugged his shoulders as if he did not like the job very much, but, drawing on his coat, for Roland had caught him abed, he announced himself ready for the trip.

The twain left the house together, but on the sidewalk they soon separated, and Roland Rash looked after his man with a peculiar smile.

"Worth his weight in gold," said he, under his breath. "To-night's mishap wasn't Chocolate's fault, it belongs to all three of us. We had the spy in our power and should have silenced him; but who thought of the girl?"

Chocolate, with his hat pulled over his darkish brow, hurried away not very well pleased with his mission.

A few squares further on he was tapped on the arm by a man who came suddenly to his side, and he was startled to look into a face he knew.

"You, Bijou?" he cried, well pleased.

"Yes."

They walked along together.

"He's loose," said Chocolate.

"The spy?"

Chocolate nodded.

"That's not so bad as what I've just discovered."

"What's that?"

Bijou, the third man in the game, bent toward his friend and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"Heavens, no! Not so bad as that?" cried Chocolate, falling back, while a look of consternation came over his face.

"But it's true. Come, you shall see for yourself."

"This way, then. We're not far off."

They bolted down a near street and pulled up in front of Iran Steele's residence.

The curtains were drawn and the shutters closed. The whole place had a dark

and lonely look, but beyond the transom they saw the faintest streak of light.

"You can investigate," said Bijou. "They won't know you, Chocolate. Come, you aren't afraid, are you?"

"Afraid? No."

Bijou stepped into the shadow of the building, and the nimble-footed Chocolate ran up the steps and jerked the bell.

It was a strange hour for a call, a late one for an investigation, but this did not deter the man.

In a little while a footstep came down the hall beyond the door and the portal opened.

Chocolate poked his face forward and looked into the eyes that seemed to glitter in the light.

"I hear that Mr. Steele has been assaulted?" said he.

The man holding the door half open looked into Chocolate's face and then pulled him into the house.

"So you've come back to see if your victim still lives, have you?" he cried.

"My victim? I am from the papers—I am a reporter—"

"You?" the other laughed. "See here, man; Iran Steele will see you now."

Chocolate might have sprung back and missed the hand which was thrust out for him, but he did not, and that hand fell heavily upon his broad shoulder.

He was jerked across the threshold and hustled down a hall by the man who opened the door.

In another moment he was ushered into a room which was well lighted, and in the middle of which sat Iran Steele in an arm-chair, pale and bloodless.

"This man was at the door," said the person, who still held Chocolate. "He claims to be a reporter, but he doesn't bear the marks of one. Look at him, Iran. You may have seen this face before."

Chocolate stood bareheaded before Iran Steele, and was looking into the tensely-drawn face as if he thought he could see that the man's life was ebbing slowly away.

Iran Steele leaned forward a little ways and fixed his deep gaze upon the man in the room.

He looked Chocolate over from head to foot, a long searching look, in which not the smallest detail of dress or looks escaped him.

Then he slowly turned his eyes to Doctor Burrows.

"I never saw this man before," he said, with an effort.

Chocolate threw a glance of victory toward the cool-headed doctor, and smiled.

"I might have saved you all this trouble," he said. "I could have told you that that gentleman never saw me before to-night."

"I never did," said Iran Steele.

"But I have," cried another voice, as the door was flung open, and in the light stood Myrtle, with a white face and flashing eyes.

"Remove her, doctor," said the man in the arm-chair. "She promised to go to bed."

"Wait," cried Myrtle. "Let me tell you—"

"No, no, child. Take her away, doctor."

With this effort Iran Steele fell back into the chair, and Doctor Burrows sprang to his assistance.

Myrtle, too, crossed the room and stopped close to Chocolate.

"You belong to the band," she said, in low tones, as she transfixed him with her penetrating gaze. "I know it. I saw all three of you on the street yesterday. The other two came here and assaulted him. They have accomplished their purpose. See?"

Doctor Burrows was working with the man in the chair, but all at once Iran Steele, with superhuman strength, rose and pushed the man of medicine away with the suddenness of a cyclone.

"Don't! Let it come!" he exclaimed, tearing at his bosom. "It can't cheat me out of any happiness, and out of no life, when William Swift comes to pay him the fifty thousand with interest. You hear me, Myrtle? Pay the man, my old partner, every dollar, and more, too. You'll

have plenty left. Don't tie the bandages again, doctor. Let me die!"

Once more he pushed the doctor from him, and Myrtle, who hastened to his side with an exclamation of sympathy, was treated in like manner.

Chocolate stood like one rooted to the spot.

The drama was terribly fascinating, and as Iran Steele fell in a heap at the foot of the chair and suddenly straightened out there, Chocolate smiled maliciously, for the man was dead!

CHAPTER X.

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.

Watching his chance, Chocolate slipped from the mansion and rejoined Bijou on the street.

"Come; I've seen the last act in a life," he spoke. "Iran Steele is dead. Come! We must move on now," and the pair quickly disappeared.

Chocolate did not lose sight of his mission, and in a short time, after separating from Bijou, he turned into a quiet-looking house as if he had been there before.

In the darkened hallway he listened, and then went on again.

"Mebbe she's left the nest," he mused. "She may not have come here after cutting the spy loose, for I'll bet my head it was her work."

Reaching the corridor he ascended a flight of steps, and when on the floor above listened at a door, which he tried only to find it locked. Not discouraged at this, he passed on into another room.

After taking a survey of the little apartment, which, while poorly furnished, had some looks of neatness, he went over to a bed in one corner, only to find it unoccupied.

"Not here! Did she go home?"

Chocolate searched the room a little, and then went out again.

He had failed to find the person to seek whom he had entered the house.

He looked displeased, and stood a moment on the pavement below.

"Could she have gone home to her mother in Midnight Alley? The old woman said she was done with the girl because she went off with the captain, but girls take strange notions sometimes, and she may have gone home."

But Chocolate seemed to think he had pursued the trail far enough, so, turning back, he sought out the house where he had left Roland Rash.

He found that worthy at home, and Roland left off looking at some papers to pay attention to Chocolate.

"I couldn't find Ortiz in the little nest," said the darkish man.

"It was empty, eh?"

"Yes."

"She may come back to-night. We must watch the place."

"The bed was not tumbled, showing that she was not in last night."

"Exactly. But what about the other person?"

Chocolate opened his eyes with astonishment.

"Didn't Bijou report?"

"I haven't seen Bijou."

"Then I will tell you. He is dead."

"Dead?"

"As dead as a smelt!"

"They told you this at the house, did they?"

"No. I saw him die."

"You?" and Roland looked nonplussed.

"They pulled me into the mansion, the doctor did, and I was taken to Iran Steele for identification."

"But he did not know you?"

"He did not," Chocolate grinned.

"Of course not," replied Roland. "So you saw him die? No mistake this time?"

"None whatever. That man will never again play out his hand."

For a little while the cold, white face of the handsome man at the table gave out no expression.

Chocolate stood in the middle of the room covertly watching him and quietly waiting for orders.

Suddenly Roland Rash rose and came over to his right bower.

"It's nearly ours, Chocolate," said he, with one of his peculiar smiles.

"I hope so."

"It is so. Nearly ours. There can be no mistake now if we entrap the other man."

"The spy, you mean?"

"Yes."

Chocolate's countenance fell, and he seemed to look away for a moment.

"We had him in the trap once, captain."

"Yes—curse our leniency! We had him in the chair, and in the dungeon!"

"And let him escape."

"I'll take the blame, Chocolate. Put it all on my shoulders, but there's a better time coming."

"I hope so."

Roland Rash waited a moment, and then looked into his companion's face.

"She's quite pretty, Chocolate," said he. The other gave a little start.

"She is. When she faced me like a tigress, saying she had seen all three of us together on the street, I thought her the prettiest woman I ever saw."

"She'll make you a fine wife, boy."

"Me?"

"Precisely!"

"You don't mean that, captain?"

"I was never more serious in all my life. Look at me. What do I want with her?"

"But I—"

"Don't refuse. You're the right age to marry, and when we're in clover you can support a wife in regal style."

"But I don't care to marry."

"So you'd sooner take a love from the Bowery than this fair young girl with a cool million back of her?"

"Is there that much, captain?"

"More, perhaps. We've fixed the fifty-thousand-dollar note. It will never be presented now."

"But Iran Steele told Myrtle to pay it. It was his last command to the girl."

A sarcastic laugh rippled over Roland's lips, and Chocolate maintained a discreet silence.

"Just think of it. You will see that it is never paid by the girl. In the first place, the note, as you know, Chocolate, will never rise to haunt you, and—"

"But, captain, I'd rather not play this hand. Give it to Bijou."

"No, she's for you!" said Roland, sternly. "There can be no failure, boy. It is as certain as death itself."

"But the girl will never marry Chocolate."

"We'll see about that. Time heals all wounds, and she will come to you for assistance."

Chocolate walked across the room and stood near the window.

"Captain, what if the other one should escape?"

"What if the heavens should fall?" cried Roland Rash.

"You would have said the same about the spy when we left him in the chair."

"True, Chocolate, but this is a horse of another color. The man from the West is in the meshes of oblivion."

"It looks that way."

"There were no witnesses."

"No."

"Then, don't let the ghost of that person frighten you. We must now turn and reap the harvest we have brought to our door. We must play out the cool hand."

"I'm ready."

"And ready to marry the girl?"

"Yes, yes. I'm ready for anything."

"That's right. I thought you would look at things in the right light, and come to your oats. We'll win, Chocolate."

"We must."

Ten minutes later the room in which this interview took place was deserted, and the two men were indulging in an elaborate breakfast in a fashionable cafe.

In another part of the city Doctor Burrows stood over the corpse of a man which he had placed on a bed.

He was alone, and the sunlight streaming into the chamber that early morning fell upon the white face of Iran Steele.

By and by the door in the hall below opened and shut, and the doctor heard footsteps come up the stairs.

He turned halfway around, and watched the door leading into the death chamber.

When it opened a curious look came into the doctor's eyes, for once more he stood face to face with Kent Keen, the Crook-Crusher.

As the ferret crossed the carpet the man at the bed waved his hand toward it, glancing at the cold face half-embedded among the pillows.

Keen stepped forward and took one look, which told the story.

"You see him dead," said the doctor, in his cold manner. "Myrtle sent for you?"

"She did."

"I left it all with her," the doctor went on. "I told her to do what she thought best, and I shall stand by her."

As he finished Doctor Burrows bent over the body and opened the garments.

He pulled the clothes aside and displayed upon the left breast of Iran Steele a tattoo of crossed pistols, and underneath it the words "Red Feather."

"You see that?" he said, looking up into the detective's face.

Kent nodded.

"It recalls the past. Last night, for good reasons, I deceived you."

"Not very much, doctor," smiled the detective.

"Very well. I did it for my patient's sake, and for the sake of the young lady in another part of the house. This man was also Mohave Merle."

"But Iran Steele in New York."

"Yes; in this city, for certain reasons, he was Iran Steele. He lived a life consistent with his new name, and the secret was well kept, but we can't keep many secrets from men of your calling."

"He was murdered?"

"Done to his death," said the doctor, still further opening the clothes of the dead. "Here is work for you. You did not witness the end. We had a witness here who must have known something more than he let on."

"Who was he?"

"I cannot say. Miss Myrtle professed to have seen him with his partners on the street, and she told him so."

"When he was here?"

"Yes, in this very room. He is a wiry, dark-faced man, with keen eyes."

"Well?"

"He left the house soon after the death struggle. He slipped out almost before I knew he was gone, and that's the last I've seen of him."

Kent Keen's gaze returned to the dead man.

"So this man was the missing partner in the Red Feather?" he said. "Mohave Merle?"

"And he was struck down by two men who came to the house evidently for that purpose. Miss Myrtle will talk when you see her. She has determined to tell you everything."

"Where is she?"

"Come!"

Doctor Burrows escorted the detective from the room and down a corridor to another door, at which he knocked.

It was almost immediately opened by Myrtle Steele, and the next moment the detective of Gotham stood face to face with Iran Steele's ward.

She was pale, but composed.

"The time has come for the truth," said she. "You shall know everything which I have kept for his sake."

The detective bowed his head and waited.

CHAPTER XI.

MYRTLE'S STORY.

Mohave Merle's ward had taken a seat and the detective dropped into a chair near the table.

"In the first place, let me establish his identity beyond all cavil," said she, opening a drawer in the stand and taking out a small, flat package.

She unwrapped this, keenly watched by the ferret, and a daguerreotype fell out upon the table.

Keen picked it up and carried it near his face.

He saw the figures of two men side by side, dressed in fantastically trimmed

buckskin garments, and armed after the manner of typical Westerners.

"It was taken, I suppose, while he was in the far West, as Mohave Merle," said Myrtle, looking at the detective.

"William Swift spoke of this picture."

The girl started violently.

"William Swift?" she exclaimed. "Has he come?"

"He came," answered the detective, with a strange smile. "He came in accordance with the terms of the note."

"Then he has the note?"

Keen seemed to lean toward the young girl.

"William Swift has vanished," said he. "The man who came from the far West to collect the note given by the person lying dead in another part of this house has vanished as effectually as if the ground had opened and swallowed him."

"The plot! the plot!" exclaimed Myrtle, turning pale again. "It is the hand of fate!"

"But we will find this man. Dead or alive, we will find William Swift, alias Broncho Bill."

"Find him! I stand ready by Iran Steele's orders to pay off that note. It shall be paid and with interest. But a hand may come between you and your man."

"Let it come, miss."

Myrtle now picked up the picture which the detective had laid upon the table, and continued:

"I shall keep nothing back. I shall not hamper you in your man-hunt. It is true, Iran Steele was Mohave Merle. I made the discovery in a startling manner, and I have kept the secret till now. Once I thought he suspected that I had obtained possession of the mystery, but I disarmed his fears and he died believing that I knew but little, if anything, of the black spot on his life, the crime of the mine."

"For he robbed his partner, William Swift. He sent that man into the world broken in heart and purse, and I would have called it just vengeance if the ruined man had slain him in this very house. Ten years ago he brought home with him a man who had the grime of the West upon him. This man he seemed to have known in other days, and they were shut up in the library for hours. I happened to overhear a part of their conversation, and I heard Iran Steele ask about a man named William Swift, whom he frequently called Broncho Bill."

"This opened a new chapter to me. It opened up a past which I knew he had been keeping from me, and I felt that I stood on the threshold of some great revelation. I listened, guiltily, of course, but I could not tear myself away from the door. It was then that the note was drawn. I heard it read, and I knew that it had been turned over to the stranger, who was to deliver it to William Swift."

"Time passed, and I heard nothing of the man who was to have the fifty thousand dollars. Others crossed Iran Steele's path. I saw that he was in a shadow of some kind. I noticed that he aged very fast, as if human leeches were sucking his blood. There were great drafts upon his resources, some hand was clutching him, and he went down the pathway of life in a shadow, I say. Who the enemy is I cannot say, but I believe that it was the hand of that foe which struck the fatal blow in the night, and one of the band saw him die."

"What was this man like, miss?"

The young girl gave a striking description of Chocolate, and the eager ferret made a mental note of it.

"You must find William Swift," said she, suddenly. "I am Iran Steele's sole heir."

"You were his ward."

"As good as his child," said she. "I have been under his roof almost from the days of babyhood. You will find the will in the safe in the library."

"But your own parents?"

"I know nothing of them. Iran Steele was reticent concerning my parents, and, seeing this, I never cared to ask him."

"Another secret of his?"

"And one which is a secret still, but he

said once that I need not be ashamed of my ancestry, as it was better than his, and that my escutcheon had no stains on it. Doctor Burrows knew, too, that he was Mohave Merle. He found that out somehow, as doctors often pick up secrets in the practice of their profession. He would have kept that secret of the mines to the last moment. But he could not keep it from the man whom he brought home ten years ago, for that person knew him on sight, and probably forced from him in a manner the fifty-thousand-dollar note."

At this Myrtle Steele crossed the room and came back with a package which she began to open in the detective's presence.

"I brought this up from the safe a while ago," she said. "It establishes his identity more than any other thing about the house."

She opened the package and pushed it toward the detective.

Out upon the table fell the hilt of a bowie-knife with an inch of the blade still clinging to it, and several bits of quartz.

But, stranger than all, there lay beside these things a dark, leathery object, to which some long, coarse hair clung.

"What is that?" asked Myrtle, pointing at this singular object.

"A scalp lock, Miss Myrtle. It is a relic of mining days. It is the scalp lock of some red man who tried to kill the two partners of the Red Feather."

A shudder seemed to shake the fair girl's form and she fell back into the depths of the chair.

Kent Keen looked at the relics a little while, and then rolled them up again.

"Those proofs of his mining life he kept under lock and key," remarked Myrtle. "They tell the story of the past—they identify Mohave Merle as no other proof could."

"That is true. These are the silent witnesses of other days. Now, when we have found William Swift—"

"What is the man like?" eagerly asked Myrtle.

"He is a handsome fellow and as brave as a lion."

"None of the rough about him?"

"A good deal of it, miss. He is a typical Westerner."

"But, saint or sinner, he shall have the fifty thousand, and as much more as he wants!" exclaimed the girl.

"He won't exact more than his dues, miss."

"Find him, that is all I ask. You tell me that he has vanished."

"He has."

"Suspiciously?"

"Yes."

"Decoyed away?"

"It looks that way."

"Then by the same foes Iran Steele had! I know it. I saw the handsome man who was with him the last time. I saw him, I say, with his companion, and then before that I saw all three of them on the street. There may be more than three, but those are all I've seen. No, nothing must turn you from your man-hunt, Mr. Keen. You are in my employ from this moment. You must find William Swift and you must bring to justice the hand that killed Iran Steele!"

"I promise you to do my best."

"You must not fail! You must put all your wits to work. You must make no mistake. Can William Swift be dead?"

"I cannot say."

"The hand which could strike Iran Steele down would surely kill the holder of the note."

"That's plausible."

"Go forth now and begin. I won't detain you another moment."

She rose and walked toward the door, her face white and her eyes scintillating like stars.

Never before had she looked so beautiful to the detective.

"I'll take care of myself," said she, as if reading the ferret's thoughts. "They may turn on me. I'll admit that, but they will find me, woman though I am, a foe worthy of their steel. I am not unarmed, as they shall see. I can cope with them if they

undertake to rob me of life or wealth, as they have plundered their dead victim."

"Good-night, Mr. Keen," and Myrtle held out her hand as she opened the door, and the detective, touching the white fingers, bowed himself out of her presence and went back to the doctor and his dead patient.

He found Doctor Dallas Burrows where he had left him a short time before, and at sight of the detective the man of medicine smiled.

"She's a remarkable girl, isn't she?" he asked.

"A wonderful combination of nerve and resolution," answered the detective.

"She has courage enough to be Iran Steele's own child, but she is not. She would make a good fighter and a fine wife."

Keen passed to the doctor's side and stood looking upon the man on the couch.

"She told you all she knew, did she?" asked Doctor Burrows.

"She kept nothing back."

"She said she would not. Myrtle is truthful, and, above all things, eager to see justice done and the guilty punished. That is for you to do. This is your work."

"I accept it."

"You must beware. I am sure that this man had enemies. What they really struck him down for is a mystery to me, but you may solve it. But they killed him. True, he did not die till some time after the mysterious assault, but they did it. She told you about the note which will be due in a few days. Where is the holder of that note?"

"In New York."

"Now? Does he know, think you—"

"That this man has been struck down? He does not know it. William Swift is ignorant of this tragedy. He knows nothing of it, but he shall know."

Ten minutes later Kent Keen walked from Iran Steele's house and the trail was begun.

He went first to his little room.

He found in a box on the table a letter which some one had deposited there, and when he broke the seal he began to read with much interest.

"Jot has been here. I haven't seen the boy for ten months, and it is queer that he should turn up just now. He kept the key he used to have to the door, and that's how he came to leave the letter in the box. He will come back. I will try and see Jot when he comes."

Kent put the letter in his pocket and went out.

He knew that the whole city would soon hear of the tragic death of Iran Steele.

But one thing would be kept from the public, and that was the secret of Iran Steele's past.

New York need not know that this rich man, this almost millionaire, was Mohave Merle.

"Now for William Swift," said the detective, as he walked from his quarters. "Now for the trail of the three kidnappers. Susie Tangle's story shall be investigated first."

The detective dropped into a small shop not far from Tenderloin Tom's place, and leaned over a counter, on the other side of which was a weakened-looking man of uncertain age, who greeted him with a good deal of profuseness.

"Did you ever sell that, Josy?" asked Kent, unwrapping a ring, which he passed across the counter.

The old man shook his head.

"Nor this?"

A single stone with a strange opaqueness fell into the outstretched hand of the lapidary.

"V'ot, has d'is stone come pack again?" cried old Josy. "It vas always comin' pack, an'—"

"You know it, then?"

The deep-set eyes shone like twin stars, the diamond was weighed on one of the wrinkled fingers, and the old lapidary laughed knowingly as he looked over his hooked nose into Kent Keen's face.

"V'ere you git 'im?" asked Josy.

"Where the owner lost the gem," was the reply.

CHAPTER XII.

"MEESTER CAPPER."

The lapidary, old Josy, as he was called, held the jewel in the light and looked at it with a twinkle in his eyes.

He knew it.

There was no doubt of this in the detective's mind, and he watched the old man curiously, letting him take his time for speech.

"It was lost, was it?" asked Josy, at last.

"Yes."

"And you find him, Meester Keen?"

"Perhaps."

"Where?" trembled on the old man's lips, but he hesitated.

He knew with whom he was dealing, and he did not want to be too inquisitive.

"You sold it, Josy?"

"Mebbe."

The lapidary was getting cautious, and it was diamond cut diamond.

"How often have you sold it, Josy?"

"One—two—mebbe three times."

"Not always to the same man?"

Josy shook his head.

"But who bought it the last time?"

"Vat you care to know for, Meester Keen?"

The detective was fast losing his patience, but he did not manifest it.

He knew the old Jew.

He knew, too, that this old fellow had a wonderful memory, a tenacious one, which held more than one dark secret connected with his customers.

And that is why many preferred to deal with him. He had closed lips and a still tongue.

"You don't care to tell me anything to-day?" said Kent, at last, as he gently took the gem from the dark fingers of the lapidary. "You can keep your secret, Josy, and trust to the future for more business through my hands."

It was a covert threat which the man understood.

He lost color as he looked into the imperturbable face of the city shadow, and gasped:

"I vasn't tryin' to beat you, Meester Keen," he hastened to say. "I was only protectin' my coostomers."

"Very well; protect them. Good-morning, Josy."

The Crook-Crusher turned toward the door, at the same time quietly pocketing the stone.

There was a sharp cry behind him, and a long arm reached over the counter and a hand seized his sleeve.

"I was not tryin' to fool you, Meester Keen," said old Josy. "I remember who bought the sparkler last."

The detective stopped.

"Then tell me."

He came back to the counter and the Jew dropped his wheezy voice to a whisper.

"Tell me, then, Josy."

"It was a fine looker with a Prince Albert an' a cane v'ot had a gold head."

"A good looker, a dandy, you say?"

"One o' d'em chaps v'ot sports diamonds and lots of monish."

"Yes, yes; but his name. Was he a regular customer?"

"Yes."

"Then you know him. You don't have to go to your books to tell me the truth."

"Not for d'at man, Meester Keen. I knows him, only I was sayin' he wears good stones, no shoddish."

"But you are keeping back this man's name."

"It was Capper—Meester Capper."

"A name, if genuine, which doesn't belie his calling," observed the ferret. "Is that his real name, Josy?"

"I t'inks it was. Wait."

The old man shambled down the little aisle between the counter and the shelves, and had stopped at the safe where he kept his books, when a heavy footstep sounded near the front door.

"Mine Gott!" rang from Josy's lips as he straightened and sent a look of fear toward the detective.

"D'at's mine coost'mer!" he cried, as he gasped for breath, coming back.

His old face was white, and all the wrinkles showed up ghastly.

"D'at's Meester Capper!"

Keen had already seen the well-built, fancy-dressed man who had just come in.

He had noticed that he was to all appearances a man of the town, nobby and handsome.

So this was the purchaser of the diamond found in the Park by Jimsy Curt and Susie Tangle, and on the spot where the man from Spokane had been literally "bagged."

It was an unexpected meeting, and the detective, while he did not care to be recognized, was glad to have a good look at the man.

As Meester Capper came down the aisle, to be waited on by Josy, who had recovered enough to be able to rub his hands with glee and to bow obsequiously, Kent turned his back and walked to the end of the room where the shadows lay.

He did this quietly, and in a manner which did not attract undue attention, and the Jew's customer did not appear to mistrust.

Mr. Capper walked boldly to the counter and leaned over it, thrusting his nose almost into Josy's face.

"Can you do anything for that?" he asked, putting out his left hand, upon one finger of which was a ring minus its setting.

"Vat, you lose it?" exclaimed Josy.

"Yes; but you needn't trumpet it in that manner. I've been a little unfortunate. You sold the other stone, you know?"

With a hurried glance at the detective, whose back was turned, and who did not appear to hear a word of what had just passed, old Josy took from the show-case a tray of stones, which he placed in front of Meester Capper.

"I want its mate," said he, fingering the diamonds.

"D'at ish almost impossible. It was a peculiar stone—"

"Yes, the opaqueness made it so."

Josy nodded.

"You might leave the ring," he said.

"To wait till some one came in with the stone I've lost, eh? I can't wait."

"Vell, d'en, you moost take a new stone without d'e coloring."

"And lose all the good luck I've been expecting by the change? See here, Josy."

"Eh?"

"I'll leave the ring three days. I'll risk it that long in your hands."

"Well, if I find a stone like d'e von you've lost I'll replace it; if not you'll get a new ring, eh?"

"Yes; I'll say so, anyhow."

The man twisted the ring from his finger and laid it upon the tray.

Old Josy picked it up and then laid it at one corner of the tray, which he returned to the show-case.

Folding the receipt which the lapidary dealt out to him, the would-be customer withdrew, and Keen came back along the counter.

"D'at was Meester Capper," gasped Josy, throwing a hasty glance toward the door.

"I thought so. Let me see it."

In another moment the detective had the ring in his hand, and was trying to replace the setting which he had carried to the shop.

"It fits," said he, with a look at Josy.

"It was made for d'e place," was the reply.

"He will come for the ring if I let him," he answered. "Keep it, Josy."

Down came the ring into the lapidary's hand, and the detective went toward the street.

Outside the sun was shining, for the morning was well advanced, and Keen's first look was after the well-dressed customer.

Not far away he stood, looking across the street in an eager manner, and at the same time tapping lightly on the curb with his cane.

When he moved away he had the detective behind him, and from that moment he was an object of interest to the man-hunter of New York.

Not long afterward he might have been seen seated quietly on a settee in Madison

Square, still tapping on the leaf-strewn ground with the gold-headed cane, and watched from a convenient point by Kent, the ferret.

Was it a meeting place?

All at once there came toward the man a boy, who, at sight of him, quickened his gait, and when quite near handed him a little packet, for which service he received a piece of money.

Meester Capper opened the packet after the boy's departure and read a letter.

The cane did not resume its tapping.

The sport rose, and, pocketing the letter, walked off, but at the same moment some one brushed the detective.

"That's one of them," said a voice.

The detective turned and looked at the speaker.

It was Jimsy Curt, the hero of the chair, and the right bower was a little excited.

"That's Bijou!" continued Jimsy.

"Bijou?"

"It's not Roland nor Chocolate. It's Bijou, I say."

"You've been watching us, Jimsy?"

"A little. Couldn't help it, you know."

"Go to the room and wait for me. Jot's come back."

"The boy?"

"Yes. Found a letter on the table from him. Go back and wait for me."

"But you know he's dead?"

"Iran Steele? I know it."

"All right. Don't let that man trap you. Don't let 'em tie you to a chair. It's dangerous."

Jimsy grinned at the thought of his own ludicrous, but decidedly dangerous, adventure, and in another moment he was off, leaving Kent to pay his whole attention to Meester Capper, now known also as Bijou.

This individual did not appear to know that he was an object of interest to one of the keenest trackers in New York, and therefore did not try to cover his trail.

He walked several squares, and suddenly brought up in front of a house, which he entered.

Kent Keen came up and noticed the number over the door; he made a mental note of it, but the next minute he felt a hand fall upon his sleeve.

"Heigho! Mr. Keen!" cried a boyish voice, as the ferret looked down into two bright eyes that seemed to scintillate with unsuppressed good-nature. "I thought it was you. Got my letter in the room, eh?"

"Yes, Jot. But you? When did you come back?"

"Just got in this mornin'. Don't like the far West, and it's not like the ole city for fun an' adventure. I wasn't cut out for a farmer, Kent, so I run off, an' just beat my way back."

The speaker was a good chunk of a boy, and a genuine city chip, who had been sent West with a lot of other boys to become farmers and what-not in some new State—the wards of some society for the betterment of city boys.

"I say, Kent, w'ot you got for me to do now?"

"Nothing just now, Jot. Stay. You know the city. You haven't had its crooks and tangles knocked out of your mind by hard knocks in Kansas."

"Not much, Kent. D'ey just couldn't do that."

"Then watch that house. Watch it till relieved, or until a well-dressed man with a black mustache and perhaps a gold-headed cane comes out. Follow him. Don't lose sight of him."

"D'e same ole business, Kent. Well, count on me as of old. You kin bank on Baxter Jot," and the boy winked as the detective moved away.

"I'm glad Jot's come back. I've missed my little street weasel ever since he went away," mused the detective, as he turned his back on the boy-watch.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RIGHT BOWER'S TRAIL.

The mystery in which the whereabouts of William Swift were buried puzzled Jimsy Curt not a little.

Kent Keen's right bower had failed to discover the fate of the man who had been decoyed from the quiet little hotel and taken to the Park, where he had been

thrust into a sack, a scene witnessed, as we have seen, by little Susie Tangle.

Jimsey was almost sure that the river would become the tomb of the man from Spokane, if, indeed, he was not already there, and he had nearly given up all hopes of hearing more from him.

His adventures at the window of the house into which he had been dragged in the very act of spying convinced him that he had found the three plotters, and he believed that they held the secret of William Swift's fate.

When Jimsey separated from Kent in the street after the detective's discovery of Meester Capper, or Bijou, he turned toward the river, and did not stop till he had gained a little house which made no pretensions to style in its make-up.

He felt that he would be recognized by the men from whose trap he had lately escaped, so with a razor and a change of clothing he so altered his appearance that, in Daisy's mirror, he looked like another person.

"It's me, an' it's not me," mused Jimsey, as he surveyed himself. "Still, for all practical purposes, it's Jimsey Curt. Just let me lay hands on 'em singly an' there'll be some fun. No more chairs for Jimsey, if you please. One's enough in a lifetime, and that'll last."

He bade his niece good-by, and left the house, taking a route which led him from the river and deeper at each step into the busy city.

Before seeing Kent, he had made sure of one thing, and this was that the harbor police had found no floater in a bag.

With his mind thus eased, and his doubts a little confused, he could go back and try to strike the Park trail.

Half an hour later he might have been seen seated in Battery Park, enjoying a pipe, while he took careful notice of the various samples of humanity which swarmed around him.

The day was not the warmest for a stroll in the wind which came up the Bay, but the sun was shining and Jimsey had selected a sunny place where he could trust to luck.

The detective's right bower had simply sought the spot for an hour's quiet thought.

He wanted time to go over the whole affair, from the beginning, and, detective-like, try and solve the mystery.

"Why didn't I think of that before now?" he suddenly cried. "It's worth tryin'."

Mr. Curt knocked the ashes from his pipe and started up.

He had been more than two hours in the sun, and when he turned away his cheeks showed the glow of health with emphasis.

"That's the man—the one walking off yonder," said a voice which Jimsey did not catch.

"The fellow in gray?"

"Yes."

"But he don't look like him."

"Never mind that; he's the man, all the same—the spy we had in hock."

The person addressed started after Jimsey, but did not overtake him.

For some time Jimsey led his follower a queer chase, and when he dodged into Midnight Alley he was seen.

Jimsey had gone back to the house where he had left Ortiz, the girl who had released him from the chair of death.

He knocked, and then fell back while he waited to be admitted.

His tracker drew off, and from a spot where he could not be seen, continued to observe the detective's spy.

When the door opened and Jimsey looked up into the face of the old woman in whose hands he had left the girl, he was received with a dark scowl.

The door would have been slammed in his face if he had not pushed his way inside and backed against the wall in a stubborn attitude.

"So you're back?" growled the woman.

"Like a bad penny, eh?" ejaculated Jimsey.

"Yes. Don't you know that you're not wanted here?"

"I don't doubt that. But I'm here."

The dark face of the old woman did not

relent, and Jimsey stepped from the wall, saying:

"Where is the girl?"

"I don't know."

"I brought her in, you know. You took her into the room yonder."

"So I did."

"Well, you didn't turn her out, I hope?"

"I don't own her."

"A vulture, even, owns her young. You're not worse than one, are you?"

"Never mind what I am. I don't own the girl. Didn't she go off with Roland Rash, the bogus money king?"

"Was it all her fault?" and Jimsey laid his hand on the woman's sleeve and felt through it a bony arm.

"I don't argue with you."

"But you'll tell me the truth. The girl's your child, and she deserves protection from her own mother."

There was a scowl and a flash by the woman, and she showed her teeth like an irritated tigress.

"Oh," said Jimsey, with a toss of his head, "I'm here to find out where she is. You know."

"Find her."

"Is she in the room yonder?"

Jimsey made a move toward the chamber along the hall, but the old creature threw herself, hissing, in his way.

The man raised his arm.

"Get out of the road!" he cried, threateningly.

"Not for you."

Jimsey caught the arm which the woman had raised, and almost sank his fingers to the bone.

She was stronger than she looked, and for several moments they struggled in the hall, but at last Kent's right bower thrust her aside and was at the door.

"Don't go in there!" almost screamed the old woman.

Jimsey paid no attention to her, but pushed open the portal and strode inside.

The room was almost dark, despite the brightness of the Autumn sun outside.

"Is that you, mother?" said a voice, and Jimsey stopped.

The room was inhabited.

"It's me, Jimsey Curt," replied the man, and a strange silence settled over the scene.

"You! the man I saved from the chair? Thank Heaven!"

Jimsey sprang across the room and threw up a curtain, which act flooded the place with light, and caused him to utter a cry of astonishment.

In a chair, bound to the arms thereof, sat the girl he had come to see.

She had been tied with a good deal of keen cruelty, and, from what Jimsey could see, was incapable of movement.

"Don't touch her!" cried a voice at the door. "She's only getting her just deserts."

But this did not check the man of the street, for he cut the cords and sent a menacing glance toward the speaker.

"This is the gentleman, mother," said Ortiz to the old woman who came forward. "I found him tied in a chair and saved him. I have turned from Roland Rash. I have found the villain out."

"Say that again, Ortiz."

The girl solemnly repeated her words.

"If I only could believe her," was the answer, and the mother's face for the first time softened.

"I'll go her bond, madam," said Jimsey. "There's truth in her eyes. She's all right."

"I believed the man. I believed that I would one day be rich as his wife, but I know different, now."

"Why didn't you kill him?"

"I can do better than that. I can help this man," and she laid her hand on Jimsey's arm.

"That's right, miss. I'm here for information. You know them all."

A vengeful look for a second lit up the depths of the girl's eyes.

"I do," she said, with emphasis.

"You know Roland Rash, Chocolate and Bijou."

"Three graceless scamps. Three hawks without a spark of mercy in their make-up."

"I can swear to that from personal experience."

"Yes, you were in the chair," smiled Ortiz.

"Now, tell me one thing. How many hiding places have these men?"

Ortiz reflected a little while.

"I know of three."

"Is there one where they could hide a man—where they could find a sepulcher for a victim?"

"There is such a place."

"Could you find it?"

"I could, but not by daylight."

"Because such a hunt would not be safe, eh?"

"That is it," replied the girl.

"Then I will come to-night. I will be here if you will promise to show me the other nest of these birds."

"Show him, Ortiz, if it evens old scores with Roland Rash," exclaimed the girl's mother.

"It is dangerous work at any time. Remember, I have never been inside of this retreat. I don't know what lies behind the doors."

"We will find that out, or at least Kent Keen and I will."

"To-night, then," said Ortiz. "You will find me here in this room and not tied in the chair."

"Not if she means to keep her promise," put in the but half-convinced mother.

"At what hour, Ortiz?"

"Say at ten."

"Then at ten," and Jimsey drew back, followed to the door by the girl.

"Be careful," said she, laying her hand softly upon his arm. "It is a deep plot for nearly a million. There is a girl mixed up in it, somehow, but I know not how, nor her name. She is some rich man's child, and she is to marry Chocolate."

"The dark-faced rascal?" cried Jimsey. "I'll see about that."

Once more in Midnight Alley, now swarming with its motley day tenants, Jimsey Curt looked cautiously around him before he started off, and seeing nothing, he put the neighborhood behind him as soon as possible.

"That was a ten-strike!" said he, with a chuckle. "No more chairs an' no more tumbles headlong into dark places. I'll have my eyes open to-night. I'll go cautious-like, an' I'll know what I'm lookin' into before I take a step."

He turned up after a roundabout trip in Kent's room, but the detective was not in.

Jimsey concluded to wait, it was the only sure way of seeing his ferret friend, and, seated in the armchair at the table, he drew his pipe.

Whether his smoking threw him into a doze he will never know, but the pipe went out, and gradually fell into his lap, while he dropped asleep in the ferret's chair.

The sun crept higher and higher.

High noon came, and the streets below thronged with their noon-day crowds.

All at once Jimsey awoke with a start.

He looked at his watch, an old-time English affair, and noted the hour with a little cry.

But he noticed more than this.

A piece of white paper lay at his feet, and he saw scrawled across it a line that stilled his heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRAIL LEADS TO WALL STREET.

Jimsey stared at the paper, sitting bolt upright in his chair.

It seemed to fascinate him, and the scrawl was so plain that he could read it without stooping.

It ran as follows:

"Be wise and live; be a fool and die!"

More than once did the detective's right bower read the terrible warning.

All at once he sprang up and across the room to the door, but it was locked.

The person who had fetched the warning had not come by the door, and suddenly lifting his eyes, he saw all.

The transom was open.

The unknown had simply thrown the paper into the room by the transom, and it,

had done his bidding by fluttering to his feet.

At last Jimsy picked up the writing and looked at it.

"It's a warnin' from d'e gang," said he, under his breath. "If I let well enough alone I live; if I don't, I die. D'at's simple, Jimsy. In fact, it's d'e simplest thing in the world, but will you? You know d'e three; you are to meet Ortiz at home to-night, and she is to take you to the other nest—perhaps to William Swift. Will you obey the warnin' or will you take d'e risk?"

Jimsy Curt decided the question then and there.

He tore the warning in two and flung the pieces upon the floor.

Then he thought of Kent Keen.

"I'll save it for him," he exclaimed, and, picking up the pieces, he put them away.

Yes, he would save them for the detective, and in a few minutes he had regained his composure and was ready to face the enemy.

In a short time footsteps were heard in the hall beyond, a key turned in the lock, and Kent stood before him.

Jimsy uttered a cry of joy.

"D'e wise man lives; d'e fool dies!" he said.

A curious expression came to the ferret's face as he came forward.

"What's that, Jimsy?"

The bits of paper were placed side by side on the table, and the right bower fell back while the detective looked at the words.

"It was meant for me," said Jimsy.

"Why not for me, too?"

"I didn't think of that."

Then Jimsy detailed the finding of the paper, and told Kent about the visit to Ortiz.

Kent, in turn, narrated his visit to old Josy, and how he had determined to trap Bijou, whom he had turned over to Baxter Street Jot for the present.

"You never took well to the boy, Jimsy, but he's worth his weight in gold."

Jimsy frowned slightly, for he had reported Jot to the society as a good subject for correction in the far West, and since then but little love had existed between the pair.

It was agreed, however, to wait a while for the boy's report, and Kent put the warning away.

By and by some one approached the door, and the detective went forward.

It was Jot.

As the door was opened the boy sprang into the room and went straight to the end of the table, where Kent had taken a chair.

"You saw him come out, did you, Jot?" asked the detective.

"Didn't I?" grinned the boy.

"Well?"

"It wasn't d'e kind o' man you thought it would be," Jot went on. "He came out without d'e mustache and he didn't carry nary a gold-headed cane."

"Changed his plumage, did he?"

"If it was d'e same bird, yes."

"It must have been the same hawk, Jot."

The boy-watch looked a little perplexed, but did not reply for a moment.

"You followed him, Jot?"

"Wasn't I left d'ar' for d'at purpose?" smiled the street Arab. "I knows my business, Kent."

"Of course."

"For a while he went off as slick as grease, an' all at once he came back in a hurry."

"Back to the house, Jot?"

"Yes."

"And you—"

"I went back, too, for d'e fox wasn't goin' ter beat Jot if he could help it."

"Certainly not."

"This time he stayed in d'e house for nearly an hour, and when he came out again he wore another coat and another hat. He started off again, an' I kept at his heels. Lordy, how he doubled, now an' d'en, as if he was tryin' to throw some one off his trail, but Jot was there all d'e same, right side up, with care."

"It was a long chase, then?"

"A stern chase, as the sailors say. But at last I ran him to cover."

"Where?"

"You wouldn't believe it. Just think of a man like that goin' where he did."

"Where did he go, Jot?"

"He went down into Wall Street, and plumped himself into a chair at a desk there."

"In a Wall Street office?"

"D'ar's where I left him. I say, Kent, aren't you mistaken about d'at man?"

The detective started a little.

Mistaken about Bijou?

Impossible!

He shook his head.

"Could you have missed him, Jot, and tracked another man?" he anxiously inquired.

The boy's eyes seemed to flash with indignation.

"Did I ever do d'at before, Kent?" he cried. "When did I ever take one man for another?"

"You are right, Jot. I have no right to question your accuracy in cases of this kind, but that that man should go into Wall Street and take a seat at a desk is past my comprehension."

"He's a slick one all the same," answered the boy spy. "If he's crooked, so much the worse for us. But he's there now—a full-fledged Wall Street broker."

Keen and Jimsy exchanged looks.

The right bower but half believed Jot's story; he was inclined to charge the boy with playing a side game of his own.

"Can you see him from the sidewalk, Jot?" asked Kent.

"D'at's just what you kin. I saw him from that point o' view just before I left him."

"Then locate him for me, and I'll take a look at him."

Jot did so, and Kent Keen picked up his hat.

"Be careful," admonished the street boy. "D'ar may be spies out. He's a slicker."

Kent nodded good-naturedly, and left Jot and Jimsy alone.

"W'ot was that stiff you gave Kent?" asked the right bower, as he gave Jot the benefit of his doubtful glance.

In another moment the boy turned upon Jimsy and returned the glance with interest.

"No crook holds down a desk in Wall Street," repeated Jimsy.

There was a good deal of acidity in his tones, and his looks denoted rising anger.

"See here, I don't serve you," and the boy rose and came over to where Jimsy sat, his face purple with rage. "But for Kent I'd be out in Kansas now, killing hoppers. You told the society w'ot a pirate I was, and how soon I'd make d'e mayor stand and deliver if I wasn't carted out West. But I'm back—I'm back to stay—to help Kent whenever I kin, an' to tell him d'e truth."

"Be a little keeful. You may go back."

"When? How? Tell me to my face, d'at I may go back to hopperdom! Never! We will never play Damon and Pythias, Jimsy Curt. Come between Baxter Street Jot and his liberty, and you'll wish you had never seen d'e sunlight!"

The pugnacious boy stepped back and drew his figure to its true height, while Jimsy fumed and flustered, but did not reply.

"I don't serve you. I don't have to report to you," continued Jot. "And if I catch you in a snap I don't have to help you out. Don't forget that."

He strode to the door and whisked himself from the room before the right bower could intercept him, and in another second Jimsy Curt was the sole occupant of the place.

"When he catches me in a tight snap," he exclaimed. "When d'at time comes—if ever—I won't ask him for assistance."

Meanwhile Keen, the Crook-Crusher, was on his way to investigate the truth of Jot's strange story.

The place to which he said he had tracked the quarry was in the heart of Wall Street, and Kent had no difficulty in finding it.

That Meester Capper, or Bijou, should

hold down a desk in that golden quarter was a double mystery to him, but he was soon to be undeceived.

He soon found the number, and the plate-glass window which gave him a view of the room beyond.

One look sufficed.

The detective started, for, seated at a desk in a revolving chair was to be seen the man he was looking for.

Meester Capper, as the employe of a gold-bug, if not playing gold-bug himself, was rather startling.

Kent looked twice to make sure of his man.

The person viewed through the plate glass was well dressed, and gave Kent a good side view.

He wore a pen behind his ear, and his clothes were scrupulously clean.

The face which he had seen with a mustache was now clean and smooth, and the broad shoulders showed up like an athlete's.

While the detective looked he saw a young man throw down a pen near the watched person and take his hat from a peg near by.

In another moment the young man came out and toward the watcher.

Keen followed him.

The name of the firm, "Sellers & Cahner, Brokers," illuminated the windows in great gold letters, and with this in his mind the detective kept after the accountant.

On Broadway he overtook the young man, who, in response to a light tap on the shoulder, turned and awaited Kent's question.

At the same time the young man turned deathly pale and his gaze fell.

The detective was quick to take advantage of favoring incidents, and the young man's pallor gave him a hint.

In a moment the ferret had locked arms with the trembling youth, and was saying:

"It's all right, sir. Don't let me frighten you. I merely want to ask you a question."

"All right," answered the young man, somewhat reassured. "What is it?"

"Who is the smooth-faced man who sits with his back to the window—the one in the revolving chair at the yellow desk?"

"Oh, that's Mr. Capper."

"A member of the firm, eh?"

"No. Our head investor. He came to us last summer, and may soon become a member of the house."

"Mr. Capper, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Jonas Capper. Came from somewhere in Jersey, I think. Did you think you knew him?"

"I didn't know but what I did. There, that's all, sir. You won't mention it? Remember, I know a good deal, sir; but it's all right if you keep still."

Again the whiteness came to the clerk's face, and Kent let him go.

"Guilty," said the detective. "But I won't expose him. The pallor gave him away. The head investor, is he? Well, Meester Capper, you're a slick one. Who would have thought that the keeper of the secret of Broncho Bill's disappearance does business in Wall Street?"

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRAP AND ITS VICTIMS.

The night soon to follow the day of adventure in New York was anxiously awaited by two persons.

These were Jimsy Curt and Ortiz.

As the hour of ten approached, the detective's right bower might have been seen making his way toward Midnight Alley.

Ortiz, ready for the adventure, awaited him in her mother's house, and after a few minutes the pair sallied forth.

"You have seen no one on the watch to-day?" asked Jimsy.

The girl shook her head.

"Then all seems safe. But they may be on the watch all the same."

"He and his friends are cunning. Roland Rash is as cool as you make them, and his companions, Chocolate and the clever Bijou, are fit friends for him."

Ortiz led the clever spy halfway across the city, and suddenly turned down a

street where but few gas-jets seemed to burn.

"This is the street," she said, with a glance at Jimsy, who had kept in her wake.

"A good place for a secret nest."

"It couldn't be better. We'll be there in a few moments. Number 99 is the place."

Number 99, when it rewarded the detective's gaze, turned out to be the best house on the street, a three-story brick, with the shutters drawn and fastened.

"Here we are. This is nest number two, and mind you I have never crossed its threshold, so I don't know what is beyond the door. If your missing friend is there he may be entombed, for the outside of the house was always enough for me."

Finding no one near the suspected place, Jimsy proposed to invade it at once, and to this end he established the girl as a guard while he proceeded to carry out what was to be the adventure of his life.

The ferret's spy slipped to the rear of the house, and after a few trials found himself on the inside.

It was dark enough for Jimsy, who did not like housebreaking under such circumstances, but nevertheless he had resolved to see himself through the venture before him.

The place was silent enough, and as Jimsy advanced in the gloom across a chamber, the dimensions of which he did not know, he stumbled against a chair which nearly tripped him.

But he found a door which was not locked, and this he opened, letting himself into a hall.

Truly, it was trailing in the dark, and the detective's right bower stopped more than once while he pursued his way.

So silent was the place, and so eager was Jimsy to see what it looked like, that when he found a corner he struck a match, shading the flame with his hand.

He was in a large, well-furnished room.

In the middle of it stood a desk, but with no fresh signs that it had been opened lately.

There was dust on the walnut lid, dust on the chairs, which surrounded him, dust everywhere.

Jimsy, holding the little light in his right hand, bent over the desk and looked at it.

All at once he heard a noise, and the light went out instantaneously.

Had some one come in?

By and by, as the sound was not repeated, Jimsy took new courage and struck his second match.

He crossed the room to a door, which he opened and walked into a corridor which ended, as he could see, a few feet away.

"I'm in luck," said he, under his breath. "This is an easy trail. Too easy for any good."

He passed to the end of the corridor, where another portal greeted him.

This, too, yielded to his hand, and as his match flickered and went out, he caught a glimpse of steps.

Jimsy wondered if Ortiz was still on guard.

He had left the girl spy on duty on the street, and well screened from observation, and he stopped now to wonder if she had discovered anything.

The steps, which seemed to lead into the bowels of the earth, were too tempting to be resisted.

Jimsy resolved to descend and see what was at the bottom of the flight.

For him to clinch this resolution was to go down, and in a short time he stood at the foot of the stairs.

It was bare ground now.

Before he had trod over carpet, now he was treading on the natural ground, and the blackness of Egypt surrounded him.

But this did not discourage the man in the cellar, and he advanced with one hand outstretched, and the other on the butt of a revolver, which he had brought to the place for use in an emergency.

It seemed a mile across the dungeon, but the detective's spy came to a wall and stopped.

He had shut the door behind him, and now bethought himself of the matches.

Once more he drew one of the lucifers

along a wall, and the little blaze leaped up.

As it brightened, Jimsy fell back as if a pit had yawned at his feet, and a cry of horror froze on his tongue.

It seemed to him that the wall had receded as if it was possessed of motion.

With the burning match over his head and his eyes ready to start from their sockets, he stood spellbound a few feet from the demon wall, beathless and speechless.

Suddenly a voice broke the silence.

"The wise man lives; the fool dies!"

Jimsy started.

It was nearly like the scrawl which had shocked him with horror when he awoke from his slumber in the detective's office.

The words were distinctly spoken, and the man in the cellar heard them like a knell of doom.

He looked toward the wall, but saw nothing; he half expected to see a hand write the words there like the writing on the wall at Belshazzar's feast.

To his consternation the match went out at this moment and again he stood in the heart of darkness.

What should he do? Strike another light?

Jimsy stood spellbound for a moment, and then thought of the door.

What if it had closed upon him, thus emphasizing the threat contained in the last half of the terrible sentence?

He crossed the room with the revolver in his hand and at full cock.

He was ready to sell his life as dearly as possible, and would fight to the bitter end for it.

He found the door, but it was closed—closed tighter than he had shut it.

"This means death," said Jimsy. "This is the work of the gang!"

He reached out and caught the iron latch, but the portal did not move.

If it had been a part of the wall it could not have been more solid.

He pulled back with all his might, but it would not yield.

Then the same dread sentence came to his ears again:

"The wise man lives; the fool dies!"

He was the fool.

He had come into that trap of his own volition, and he was to remain there.

It was worse than the chair.

It was infinitely more terrible than the ropes and the unyielding arms of the chair which he had filled in the dungeon in the other house.

Jimsy fell back at last, and in his desperation struck another match.

If he was to die there he would see the place.

He went round the dungeon with the flaring lucifer, and soon discovered that at a certain corner the match got air and nearly went out.

It was from that particular part of the place that the voice seemed to come.

The man stooped and put his face close to the wall, and it was fanned by a little current of air.

Perhaps here was the avenue to liberty.

Jimsy went to work.

He tugged at the stones in the corner, but he soon discovered that as well might he tug at the foundation of the pyramids.

No escape in that direction, only torn and bleeding fingers.

He was in another death-trap!

As he rose and went back he caught another sound which was not that of a human voice.

It sounded to him like the grating of the key in the lock of the door.

Jimsy stood still, with his heart in his throat.

Sure enough, it was the lock, and as he went forward with the intention of springing over the threshold the moment the door opened, he felt that here was a chance at last.

The door opened, but it closed before he could reach it.

Something fell at Jimsy's feet.

It struck his lower limbs, and he fell back with a cry.

"What was that? Have I a fellow-prisoner?"

He finished as he felt a human figure on

the floor, and then a muffled exclamation reached his ears.

He was alone no longer.

The last match was in Jimsy's hands, and he struck a light.

"You?" he cried, the moment he looked at his feet.

There was no response, but a pair of eyes full of mute pleading looked up into his face.

"They pounced upon you, did they," and Jimsy tore the bandage from his companion's mouth and heard her cry of terror.

"They found me out there when I thought I was safe. They came down upon me like a brace of panthers. I did not hear them at all. I was in their hands before I knew they were about."

"Who were they, girl?"

"Chocolate and Bijou."

"Not Roland Rash this time?"

"Not him; but they work under his orders."

"They carried you into the house? They fetched you bound and gagged, to share this place with me?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Had you seen nothing?"

"I had. I saw a light in the third story. I was about to sound the signal, but they were too quick for me. I was in their power!"

Jimsy had lifted Ortiz to her feet, and together they stood in the gloom, speechless.

Neither seemed to want to be the first to break the silence of the death-trap.

"We must get out!" suddenly cried the girl.

"Aye! But how?"

Was Jimsy's proverbial courage forsaking him?

"We must, I say," and the hand of Ortiz fell upon his arm. "If we perish here it is his victory, and the fate of the man from Spokane will never be solved. We must not die where we are."

"I wouldn't, for all New York. No one will ever get a tombstone who dies in this trap," grated Jimsy. "But there'll not be any expenses attached to the obsequies, that's one encouragement."

Ortiz did not reply to this funeral humor, and Jimsy relapsed into silence.

They made the rounds of the place together.

"I told you that I did not know anything of the interior of this house," said Ortiz.

"I already know more about it than I care to," was the reply. "I want to see but one other side of life here, an' d'at's d'e outside."

"Listen," cried the girl, "some one is talking. Is it to us?"

"It's d'e old sayin'—d'e one I saw on d'e paper in Kent's room."

"Heavens! What does it say? The wise man lives; the fool dies!"

Ortiz repeated the words as they seemed to emanate from some point beyond the wall.

And when the last one died away the doomed pair stood with silence about them, wondering when they would be added to the list of mystery's victims.

CHAPTER XVI

A LINK FROM THE FIRE.

As a matter of course the startling death of Iran Steele became the property of the public.

Not only this, but the circumstances surrounding it claimed the attention of the authorities and the superintendent of police took the matter in hand.

Kent Keen, already on the trail, found himself summoned to police headquarters upon his return from investigating Baxter Street Jot's discovery, and in a short time he was closeted with the officials on Mulberry Street.

What Detective Keen told the superintendent does not concern the narrative which makes out this drama of real life in the great metropolis, but that he gave that official to understand that he would bring to light the hand which smote Iran Steele goes without saying.

He had seen the man called Copper installed in comfortable quarters in Wall

Street, and had learned that he was the head investor of one of the large brokerage firms there.

And this same man was the Bijou of the plotters.

He was also the identical person who had left his ring with old Josy, the lapidary, for a setting like the one he had lost from it, and the shrewd detective did not doubt that he was one of the three who possessed the secret of Broncho Bill's doom.

While Jimsy and Ortiz were in the dungeon with the words of doom sounding in their ears, the ferret of Gotham might have been seen in another part of the city.

He trusted in Jimsy's shrewdness to discover what was in the house to which the girl had promised to guide him, but for once he reckoned without his host.

Keen was watching the house inhabited by Roland Rash, for Jimsy had directed him to it, and he stood where he had a good view of the nest.

As the hours wore on, and pedestrians passed and repassed the house, the statue-like figure of the ferret did not move.

He was a good watcher, was Kent Keen; he possessed the patience of a lamb combined with the shrewdness of the fox, and while he watched the place he took notice of all who passed.

Jot was off on another mission, and Kent hoped to compare notes with the street Arab upon his return home later in the night.

By and by the door of the house opened, and Roland Rash came out, and, stopping on the steps, coolly lit a cigar.

The fragrance of the weed was wafted to Kent's nostrils, and he whiffed at it, trying, for the moment, to guess the brand of Roland's choice.

Roland was well dressed, and when he stepped from the stones he was followed.

Cleanly shaven and agile of step, the young man appeared like a lover going to meet his sweetheart, and Kent followed him as he walked along.

In a short time Roland Rash had cleared a good deal of city space, and had rung a bell attached to the door of an elegant house.

He was at once admitted, and the detective drew off a moment and fell to watching the place.

"Could I see you a moment, sir?"

Keen turned and looked into the face of a man whose eyes had a singular look. He did not know the speaker.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Not here, if you please. You've been following the man who just entered yon house? So have I."

The Dead-Game Detective started slightly.

"Never mind. It's all right, I guess. You may have cause to follow him, but if any man has, I'm that person."

"You, sir? You know him, then?"

"Don't I? Who knows him better?"

A strange smile came to the man's face while he spoke, and he glanced toward the nearest corner.

"He's good for two hours, anyhow, so we can adjourn around the corner," he replied. "He's struck a good lead in that house, a gold mine, so to speak, if we let him work it."

Kent more than half believed the man, so he permitted him to take him to the corner, which they turned.

"That man was Roland Rash—the old Roland of other days," pursued the detective's companion. "You didn't happen to know him then?"

"Perhaps not."

"I did. Look here."

The man pulled up one cuff and displayed a scar on the wrist.

"His autograph," he grinned, with a look at Kent Keen. "He can make them. You don't know him? I thought not, but you were following him."

"I only wanted to see where he went."

"The woman in the case lives in that house. She's as pretty as a pink, and there's lots behind her. What cares Roland if she gives him her undying love? He'll cast it aside for her money or the gold her father has. That's the game. It's the cat

and the mouse. The mouse always gets the worst of the bout."

"Always, my friend," said Kent.

"I happen to know some things connected with the life of that slick duck. I know Roland—the old Roland, you see. I also know a little about Bijou and Chocolate. Chocolate, by the way, is a dandy. He is the man of all work of the three, and the keenest one of the trio."

"But you, my friend?"

"Call me Morgan. That'll do, won't it?"

"Perhaps."

"Now for business. You want to see more of Roland Rash, don't you?"

"I don't care about disturbing him."

"No? Very well. I won't disturb him very much. I'll just call him out."

"Now?"

"Pretty soon. He knows me, and he will come out when I ask him to do so."

"After that—"

"Oh, I'll just leave him to your mercy."

"But I don't want you to do that."

"You mean you don't want to put a stop to his devilry? You want him to go on and on this he reaps the harvest and blights the life of the beautiful girl in yon house?"

"Time enough yet."

"Not much time. The wedding comes off day after to-morrow."

The detective started.

"It can't be that it's gone so far."

"It has. He is the perfection of grace and truth to the people yonder. He is the acme of honor. Why, sir, that man has a tool in Wall Street and another in another nice place in this city. What those three men won't do isn't worth doing. Besides this, he would commit murder to carry out his ends, and a little deception in love—pshaw! That's nothing for that cool chicken."

The detective could not suppress a smile at this.

"Why are you watching him?" suddenly resumed the man called Morgan.

Should he tell him?

The face looked honest, and there was some evidence that he hated Roland.

Kent leaned toward Morgan and said:

"Did you ever hear of William Swift?" he asked.

"There's the name again," cried Morgan. "It's the name I picked up in the house yesterday."

"In what house?"

"In Roland's."

"In what shape was that name?"

"Here, see for yourself," and the speaker took from his pocket a bit of paper which had been in the fire.

The edges of it were burned in a zigzag manner, but there was a name to the paper which the detective observed as he leaned toward the lamp with it.

"That's the name," said he, looking at Morgan. "Why, man, this is a part of the famous note."

"I thought it was something of that kind. That's the way it looked to me the moment I saw it. Was the note given to William Swift?"

"It was—by one Iran Steele."

"Oho, the man who just died—the millionaire on M— Street."

"Yes."

"But there's one thing certain. Roland Rash isn't William Swift, but the note was found in his house by me."

"On the floor?"

"At the edge of the grate, where there were more bits of burned paper. There's some new rascality afoot."

"May I keep this?"

"Yes. I guess you're the man who ought to have that piece of paper. He won't miss it, I guess, inasmuch as he had a chance to destroy it, and maybe thinks he did. But that note given to William Swift by the dead man puzzles me considerably."

"It doesn't puzzle me much, Mr. Morgan," said Kent.

"Ha! you know, then?"

"A little. I know that it is due in a few days. You can almost say hours. But just now William Swift is missing."

"In this city?"

"The man came on from Spokane to collect that note, which was for fifty thou-

sand dollars. And you found this fragment in Roland Rash's house?"

The man Morgan gave Keen a long look and a searching one.

"You must be a detective," said he.

A slight smile at the corners of Kent's mouth was all the answer he got.

"Then you're doubly welcome to it!" Morgan exclaimed. "I wouldn't keep it from you for the world. But that's Roland Rash all over. Always into some rascality. I say he wouldn't stop short of murder and the theft of a note, no matter for what sum, would be in his estimation only a little notch on the road to success. But beware of him. He's a silken tiger."

"A dangerous man?"

"More than dangerous. I don't know where he hasn't been. I can't tell you what he hasn't done, for nearly all the grades of villainy has been passed by that sleek duck."

In another moment Morgan had rounded the corner, and was walking toward the house, when the detective checked him.

"What, don't you want him?" he asked, in amazement, looking into the Dead-Game Detective's face.

"Not just now."

"You don't want to save that young girl years of wretchedness? You don't want to close in on Roland Rash?"

"I want all the links in the chain."

"And while you hunt for the last one he may escape."

"I'll risk that."

"Well, you take things very cool," observed the man. "I never saw your like."

The detective talked a moment longer with Morgan, and the two walked off together.

"I'll try it," said the ferret's companion. "I'll see what I can do, but it's a little risky. Bijou or Chocolate may drop in."

"Try it. I'll watch the house."

They pulled up in front of Roland's house, and the detective remained outside while Morgan, with a latch-key, opened the door and vanished.

The man was gone twenty minutes.

When he came out he placed in the detective's hand a little package, which was immediately transferred to the ferret's pocketbook, and the vicinity was left behind.

Some squares away Keen bade his new-found acquaintance good-night, and turned homeward.

He went straight to his own little chamber and turned on the gas.

He seated himself and emptied upon the table the contents of the package received from Morgan.

They looked like pieces of charred paper, and after an hour's work he had put together nearly the whole of Broncho Bill's note.

The detective looked up with a triumphant smile.

He knew the importance of the link he had found; he felt that he had achieved a great victory.

And then he settled back in his chair and began to wait for Jimsy and his report.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH BIJOU REPORTS.

But Jimsy Curt did not come.

The Dead-Game Detective might have waited till the dawn of another day without seeing the face of his right bower, and the long minutes left him a little impatient in their passing.

It was past midnight when the detective roused himself and turned toward the door.

Jimsy was still missing.

Could he have trusted the girl, Ortiz, too far?

Was she, after all, the hired tool of Roland Rash and his companions, and had the right bower rushed into a death trap like the one of the chair?

It was an early hour of the new morning when Kent Keen quitted his room.

Down on the street all was quiet enough and the lamps flared in the early winds of morning.

He wondered if Roland Rash, now un-

watched by the man Morgan, had left the

house to which he had tracked him, and if he were back in his own place.

Kent made his way to Midnight Alley, for Jimsy told him where he would find Ortiz's mother.

He was met at the door of the house by the old woman, whose face for the first time in months showed traces of anxiety for her child.

Ortiz had not come back.

"She went away with the man whom she promised to guide somewhere. She was to show him where Roland Rash had a new nest, and they have not come back."

"They went at ten?"

"At ten. That was the hour, and he was on time."

Keen was in the act of turning away when the hand of the mother fell upon his sleeve.

"You don't like that man?" said Ortiz's mother.

"Roland Rash?"

"That sleek demon! The man who told my child a pretty tale and drew her into the flame as a moth is drawn."

"I don't like the man."

"I thought not. Wait, she may come back."

The detective waited.

Once or twice he heard footsteps in the alley beyond the door, and they seemed to stop a moment in passing.

The keen-eared old woman heard them, too.

"Have they followed you?" she asked.

"I think not."

"But you don't know him. You don't know what that man will do."

The detective stepped to the door and listened.

Some one was out in the alley; not only this, but quite near the door.

"You can see him from the upper window," whispered the woman.

Kent smiled and slipped up-stairs, where he found a sash raised, and where he looked cautiously down the alley.

At first he saw nothing, and then he made out a human figure in the doorway.

It stood there like a statue.

After looking at it a while the detective drew back and went down to the woman.

"He is out there—the spy."

"I thought so. It is either Roland Rash or his tool."

"It cannot be Roland. He is too much of a dandy to play spy in Midnight Alley."

"That man? Never! He is not too dandified to do anything. All the meanness of the devil is concentrated in that man. He is out there, I tell you, and not for the first time."

"Not for the first time? What do you mean?"

"Simply that he's been there before."

"Looking for your daughter?"

"And for me. I sent him word, yes, I did—"

The mother of Ortiz Orth stopped and seemed to grind her teeth.

"I sent him word more than once that my time would come when he would have his vitals torn out by these hands of mine. I told his best man that."

"His best man?"

"The one Ortiz calls Bijou. I told him on the street where I ran across him one evening dressed like a prince, to tell his master that some day he would feel in his throat the fingers or the dagger of Margaret Orth."

The detective looked toward the door.

"Let's drag him inside," cried the woman. "Let's trap the man—the spy—out there and make him tell what he knows."

But this was not to the ferret's liking, and he resolved to see more of the man outside.

If he were Roland Rash he would know it.

"Ortiz and your friend went to look for a missing man, didn't they?"

"Yes, for William Swift."

"That man yonder knows where he is. He can tell if he will. Pull him in and choke the truth out of him."

"It might be labor lost, madam. He might seal his lips and divulge nothing."

"These would make him tell," and Margaret Orth thrust her hands into Kent's

face. "I would wrench the truth from him or leave him dead on the floor."

Once more the detective slipped to the open window and looked down into the alley.

As he did so the figure moved, and the man who had played spy started off.

Then it was that the ferret had a good look at him.

He was tall and not very well dressed.

He noticed that he had an agile gait, and that he cast a glance up at the window, but seemingly without seeing him.

Was it Roland Rash—the man whom he had left earlier in the night in another part of the city?

"He is gone," he said, coming back to Margaret.

"See what we've missed," exclaimed the old woman. "We may never have another chance like that."

"Never mind, the rascal will run to the end of his tether one of these days."

"But not until he has achieved another triumph. Don't say in the future that it was my fault that he got away to-night."

Keen promised that he would not, and in another minute had turned himself out of the house in Midnight Alley, and was walking rapidly over its stones.

As for the spy lately at the door, he had already vanished.

He had slipped from the house in the alley, and the lights, ere they were extinguished for the day, saw him pass out of sight.

Half an hour later he turned up in a luxuriously furnished room, and in the same garb in which he had played his nocturnal hand, threw himself into a chair.

For a moment he was alone, but not longer.

Footsteps came down a flight of steps in the hall, and the door opened.

"You, Bijou?" cried Roland Rash, at sight of the man, who smiled. "You beat me back!"

Bijou came over to the table and leaned against it, folding his arms and looking down at Roland.

"I hadn't so much to do, perhaps," said he. "But I was just as successful as you could have been, no matter what you had in hand."

"Was Chocolate with you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what happened?"

"Two in the nest."

"Not two?" cried Roland Rash, almost starting from his chair.

"Not one less. Two precious birds with one stone."

"This is news. Tell me."

Bijou helped himself to a cigar, which he lit ere he spoke again.

"They were bent on seeing what was in the nest," said he. "Well, they know now."

"But you haven't named them."

"That's easily done."

"Go on."

"The spy whom we had in the chair is there."

"Good! No escape this time."

"That's right; no freedom from the dungeon."

"And the other?"

"It is Ortiz."

Roland started.

"The girl?" he cried.

"Yes, the girl."

"And to think that I listened at the house in the alley. You could have saved me that task, Bijou."

"I didn't know you went thither."

"Never mind. It's all right. So you entrapped both of them?"

"Yes."

"The girl was on the watch and the spy was inside."

"I understand. She must have guided him to the place."

"Undoubtedly. It looks that way."

"You had no especial trouble caging the birds, Bijou?"

"None at all. Everything played right into our hands. The spy was in the cellar, and all we had to do was to shut the door on him and shoot the bolt till we had company for him."

"And they're there yet?"

"They're still in the darkness and with-

in the shadow of death. It is our secret, captain."

"Let it remain so. The spy will never report to his master. We hold the key which unlocks this mystery."

"And in a grip of iron, Bijou. You've done well. Where's Chocolate?"

"He did not come home. I left him on the street."

"To be tracked by some one?"

"Who would track him?" asked Bijou. "You forget that we've just corralled the spy."

"Yes, but there's the detective."

"Who knows nothing of the nest, and who would not recognize Chocolate in the clothes he wears to-night."

Roland Rash arose and stood beside the table.

"Did you make a fire after you came in, Bijou?" he suddenly asked.

The other shook his head.

"I made no fire."

"But some one has swept the front of the hearth, yonder," and the hand of Roland pointed to the stones near the grate.

"I did not notice that," and Bijou went over to the spot.

"We destroyed the note and threw the ashes over there," Roland went on.

"I remember that."

"But look! What has become of them? Can't you see that some hand has swept the stones in front of the grate?"

"I had not looked before."

Both men went over to the grate, and Roland, with a face now strangely white, bent over the stones.

He ran his hand over them and swept up a few bits of charred paper, which he carried to the table.

Bijou followed him.

"You don't think some spy has been here?" he asked, anxiously.

"I won't say. I can't see among these bits of paper any semblance of the note. I burned it well and threw the stuff down yonder; but you see that it looks as if some one has been in the room."

"It could not have been the spy we caught in the trap."

"Did you search him?"

"No."

"Well, if he is in the cellar, it is death, and in time we can search his corpse. They will perish together, the girl and her dupe, for she unwittingly entrapped him. She was pretty, Bijou, and at one time you could have had a fine wife, but—"

Roland Rash ended suddenly in a laugh, in which Bijou joined, and looked toward the grate again.

"With the spy in the dungeon and with Ortiz out of the way, we have now but the other two," said he.

"The other two, captain?"

"Yes, Detective Keen and the man from the far West!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SWOOP OF A VULTURE.

The grave closing over the remains of Iran Steele left the mystery of his taking off unsolved so far as the public were concerned.

It was the night that followed the day of the burial, and Myrtle, the ward left behind to inherit the great wealth of the dead man, was alone in the library looking over the contents of the steel safe in which the man of two names kept his private treasures.

The fair girl sat at the desk upon which she had heaped the contents of the safe, and her hands were rapidly running through the packages of papers, sorting them out, as she mentally said, for the executor.

She had been at this self-imposed task for more than two hours, and while the hour was not late, she felt that she would rest easier in the parlor than in the high-ceilinged library, the last room in which she had seen Iran Steele previous to his sudden end.

In the midst of her work she heard the silvery tones of the bell, and, having let her maid take a short vacation to rest after the nerve-shattering events of the last few hours, she rose to answer the ring in person.

A well-dressed man stood on the stoop—a man with a smooth face and oily manners.

Myrtle instinctively looked him over from head to foot as she held the door ajar.

He held out a card as he rather boldly advanced into the house, and she read upon it, in the light of the jet, the name of "Roger Takem, Detective."

Once more Myrtle looked at the caller, and then opened the door a little more.

"Just a few minutes, miss," said the man, as he came in. "I have become interested in the manner of your guardian's death, and if you will give me a little of your time—"

"Please step into the parlor."

She led the way to the parlor, on the right of the hall, and the caller stepped in, hat in hand.

"I presume the matter has been placed in the proper hands," he said.

"It has. Already detectives are at work, for it is demonstrated beyond doubt that Iran Steele died from the attack by the two men who called at the house that fatal day."

"Yes, the two men. I am told that you saw them."

"I did."

Myrtle spoke with resolution.

"It is said that you claim to have seen them before on the street."

"I did. I saw not only those same men, but another who I now believe was connected with them."

"A third party? That makes a trio, and as nice a lot of conspirators as one cares to work against. The more the merrier, miss."

Myrtle did not like the man's levity, but she did not rebuke it.

"May I ask into whose hands the case has been put?" said Roger Takem, as he leaned toward the girl.

She hesitated.

"Oh," said he, "if that is a secret, I pray don't reveal it. I merely asked, since I am a detective myself, and have a desire to know into whose hands you have put such an important matter."

"I believe it is in the hands of Mr. Keen."

"Kent Keen, I think?"

"Yes. He has been here and is in possession of all the points we were able to give him."

"And you have entrusted this matter to good hands, miss. I would not place a straw in the path of Kent Keen. I revere his acumen, and, if the mystery is still unsolved when he makes his report, then it will not be solved till the day of judgment."

"You have a very good opinion of Mr. Keen's abilities."

"None could have a better, miss. As a rule, we detectives are inclined to jealousy, but in this case there is not a sign of such a thing."

Myrtle did not speak.

"As a matter of course, you are Iran Steele's sole heir."

"I believe so."

"Debts, I understand, he had none."

"Not many; but he had an important debt, and one which I shall take pleasure in paying."

"Not large, I hope, for your sake."

"It is in the shape of a note for fifty thousand dollars."

Roger Takem appeared startled.

"Can it be possible, Miss Steele, that he owed a sum of that magnitude?"

"He did. And, what is more, it is a debt which must be paid first of all."

"I would not have thought him involved to such an extent, but these Wall Street transactions ought to astonish no one—"

"I beg your pardon, it was not a Wall Street debt."

"No?"

"It was a note which he gave ten years ago, and which is about due."

"It has had a long run."

"Unusually so. Notes, as you know, do not run so long."

The detective nodded.

"From what I can find out, it is a debt which, above all others, should be met. I am ready to pay the note upon presenta-

tion, and as soon as William Swift presents it, it shall be cancelled."

"Beyond this there are no other obligations resting upon your shoulders, miss?"

"I know of no others."

"William Swift is a lucky man to stand on the threshold of a fortune like that. No doubt he will come soon."

"He is to come on the day the note is due, but just now I understand that he is unavoidably delayed."

Myrtle spoke in a manner which conveyed the idea that she possessed a secret concerning William Swift's absence, but Roger Takem did not press the subject.

"I do not want to interfere with the case already in Kent's hands," said he. "But if you would kindly show me several parts of the house, miss, the library and the room in which he died, I would be under many obligations."

This was asking a good deal, but Myrtle rose and led the way from the parlor.

She did not think of the disordered condition of the library, the open safe door, and the littered desk, till she had ushered him into the room, and then it was too late to recede.

Roger Takem stepped into the handsome room and looked at the objects which spread themselves before his gaze.

"I see," said he, with a smile. "I interrupted you when I came in. You were just going through his papers?"

Myrtle lost a little color.

"I was looking over the contents of the safe and placing things in order for those whose duty it will be to take care of them for me."

"Very thoughtful, indeed," answered the man, all the time drawing near the desk with his velvety, fox-like tread. "I see you have quite a task before you, miss."

At the same time he ran his eye over the heap of papers on the mahogany desk, and as Myrtle drew nearer he whirled upon her and grasped her wrist.

In an instant the girl knew she had gone too far with this man.

She drew back the length of his arm, but he did not loosen his grip.

"All's fair in love and war, miss," he laughed, his countenance suddenly changing. "This isn't exactly love, nor is it real war, but you'll see more of it by and by."

At the same time Myrtle was jerked forward and something soft like a handkerchief was pressed against her face, and she seemed to pass into a deep slumber.

For half a minute did Roger Takem hold the millionaire's daughter a prisoner, then he lowered her into an armchair at the desk and lowered the light.

"It was slickly done," he grinned. "Didn't take much finesse, but all the same, it required a little cunning."

She looked like one asleep in the chair; her face was white, and her breathing regular.

"She's good for an hour," he went on, turning to the pile of papers on the green baize.

He went through them swiftly and with eager fingers.

Two or three he threw to one side, and others he seemed to balance in his hand as if weighing their importance from outside appearances.

By the time he had gone through the lot he had several which he afterward thrust into an inner pocket, buttoning his coat over them and then casting a look at Myrtle.

"Now for the other room."

He left the room, locking the girl in the library, and ascended the stairs to the scene of Iran Steele's death.

This chamber he went through with nimble fingers and eager eyes.

He worked fast, but nothing escaped his vision, and at the end of thirty minutes he turned away.

Once more he went down-stairs, glancing over the transom into the library, and catching sight of the inanimate form of Myrtle in the armchair.

"She's all O. K. yet," said this man. "She's not in the least danger, but I must go."

Just then he happened to glance at his own hand, and a little cry escaped his lips.

"The same devilish luck!" he grated. "How often am I to lose my jewelry?"

He bolted to the foot of the stairs and opened the library door.

In another moment he was at Myrtle's side, and his eyes were looking over the carpet at her feet.

"I was a fool to wear it to-night, anyhow," he muttered. "It's been loose for some time—"

He stopped as if he was in a stew.

"It must be here somewhere. I surely had it on when I came in, and if it's in the house, why, I'll have it!"

He searched the floor closely. He lifted Myrtle from the chair and held her in his arms while he looked under the chair.

After this, in his eagerness, he got down upon all fours and crept over the flowers of the carpet, still looking with eagerness for that which he could not find.

"Curse the luck! Could I have dropped it in the parlor?"

He sprang up and went over to the parlor, which he subjected to the same examination; then he went up-stairs, but came down with disappointment on his face.

"I must have dropped it on the street. I'll get even with Josy for selling me such a ring. The old herring should be choked for his meanness, anyhow."

With a last glance at Myrtle he went to the front door and peered out.

The coast looked clear.

In another moment Roger Takem had slipped from the mansion and was on the street.

He made himself scarce in a jiffy, but some time afterward he turned up in another part of the city, when he took a long drink at a sideboard deftly set in a wall.

"Not so bad, after all," he chuckled, seating himself at a table and taking from his pocket the papers he had brought away with him. "What are they worth?—their weight in gold? I'll soon see."

All at once he uttered an exclamation of triumph.

"They're worth what they'll weight in diamonds!" he cried. "We've got the whole thing in our own hands now, or at least, I have it in mine. Bijou, you're in luck. No more playing double in New York. You needn't hold down a desk in Wall Street and play head investor for Sellers & Cahner. You've got a better thing of it. You can pave your way into society with gold and be head bird of the golden flock, if you're discreet."

The next moment the man sprang to the window and jerked aside the heavy curtains there.

He pressed his face against the pane, but saw nothing.

If he had looked a little closer, if he had leaned out of the window, he might have seen a little figure crouched against the bricks beneath the sill—a figure which had two piercing black eyes.

Bijou was too short-sighted for his own good.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAN FROM SPOKANE AGAIN.

Kent Keen, the Crook-Crusher, was more than puzzled over Jimsy's absence.

He was mystified, and as the night wore on without fetching the right bower around to the office, the ferret resolved to start out on the trail.

It was soon after forming this resolution in his rooms that he was visited by Baxter Street Jot.

The boy had a smile on his face, and as he had not seen Kent since his visit to Wall Street, his first question was about the man at the desk there.

"It is Bijou, the old Bijou of the gang," said the ferret. "It is also Meester Capper, old Josy's patron. There's no doubt of it, Jot."

"I told you he was a hummer," grinned the boy. "That man is a cute pullet, and as slick as grease."

"I want you to watch him, Jot."

"Won't I, though? Won't I take care of the sweet-scented Bijou? That's just to my liking, Kent, only you keep Jimsy away from my trail."

"From present appearances," said Kent, "Jimsy is liable to remain out of your way for an indefinite period," and then he

narrated his visit to Midnight Alley and told of the disappearance of Jimsy and Ortiz.

The boy listened to the story with keen interest, but made no comments, and Kent let the subject drop.

"Another trap has caught Jimsy," thought the detective. "He has simply fallen into the hands of the common enemy, and that means danger to him. Ortiz may have fared no better."

It was while Myrtle Steele was entertaining her nocturnal caller that the well-known figure of the Gotham ferret might have been seen in a certain quarter of the city not far from the scene of Jimsy's last adventure.

He had tracked thither a man who looked to him very much like Roland Rash, and was now watching a house into which he had deftly let himself by means of a night key.

It was the head of the gang—the chief plotter, and when Roland had locked the door behind him he stood for a moment in the hall, amid profound darkness.

The man knew the house.

He felt his way down the corridor and stopped suddenly at a door, which he presently opened.

At the bottom of a flight of six steps he stood still and listened a little while.

"There yet," he said. "Bijou was right—the trap caught the birds."

Thus satisfied, he passed up and once more found himself in the house proper.

"I don't know whether I ought to look into the old trap or not," he mused, in a dark room where he had found a chair and a table.

"I ought to make sure of him. He's the most dangerous man of the whole game, for if by chance he should get out—I'll look."

Having made up his mind, he went out, and once more tramped nearly to the end of the hall, but entered a chamber alongside, shutting the door carefully behind him.

A minute later he stood in another room and struck a light.

It was a small room, and at the end of it was a door so low that no one could have crossed the threshold without stooping.

Roland advanced to this portal and opened it, but with extreme caution.

A damp, musty smell came from beyond the portal, and nearly extinguished the match in his hand.

"So you've come at last, have you? What means this?" said a deep bass voice beyond the door, and a face appeared at the iron bars which crossed the open door.

Roland saw emerge from the gloom the figure of a man, stalwart and rough, and a face was pressed almost against the iron bars.

"What means this? This is America, isn't it?"

A malicious grin came over Roland's handsome face.

"You have no right to kidnap me and bring me here. I am a free-born American. I am simply William Swift, seeking my rights, yet you coolly kidnap me and fetch me to this infernal place."

The eyes snapped, and Roland, with a sudden look of fear, drew back a trifle.

"You took the note, too. Where is it?" demurred the prisoner.

"Where it's safe."

"In your hands, of course. You're a highway robber!"

"Just as you please, William Swift. If you will take things as they come you may get out of this place."

"The other one said that before."

"But it's true."

"What am I to do?"

Roland folded his arms and the light of the burner near the door showed him the face of the missing man from Spokane.

"You can't get the money," said he.

"I can't, eh? But it's mine!"

"You can't collect from a dead man."

"A dead man?"

The man in the little room threw his hands to his head, and for a moment seemed overcome with astonishment.

"You don't mean that!" he cried.

"It's true. Mohave Merle is not in the land of the living."

"Then you've found him?"

"Yes, but he can't pay you."

"But there's his estate."

"It's insolvent."

William Swift did not seem to comprehend the term.

"It's what?" he queried.

"There's nothing left. The man died bankrupt. He was well off when he executed the note, but—"

"Then, in the name of Heaven, why this treatment of me?"

"I'm coming to that," said Roland.

"There's a woman in the case."

"Oh!"

"If one dollar of the note is paid you beggar a beautiful girl and cast her upon the world."

A singular leer came to Broncho Bill's face.

"Are you her champion?" he asked.

"Did she make you her agent?"

"I speak for her."

"Let me see her."

"Not yet—not till you've sworn not to molest her in any way, not to beggar her."

The figure of the man from the West was drawn to its full height and the eyes again got a flash.

"I war against no woman," said the prisoner. "I will beggar no girl. She can have every dollar of the fifty thousand. I will tear the note to pieces before her rather than deprive her of a single pleasure. But you could have said so before you sacked me and fetched me hither."

"Perhaps, but we thought best to do what we did."

"Hand me the note," and the hand of the prisoner was thrust between the bars and Roland fell back to escape it.

"It will turn up all right if you accept our terms."

"Your terms? What right have you to offer terms to me?"

"Never mind that. You are in our power."

"Curse you! I know that."

"You have simply vanished like a sunbeam. The best detectives would never look here for you."

"Perhaps not."

"The papers know nothing of your coming to New York. Your name hasn't found their columns; you are out of the world—as good as dead."

The veins of the Westerner's forehead were seen to swell.

"But the terms?" he cried.

"They are these: In the first place, you must subscribe to a certain paper which will be handed you; you must sign it and keep its provisions."

"Hand it here."

"It will be brought to you to-morrow."

"What, you don't intend that I shall pass another night in this place?"

"It's unavoidable. In the second place, you must renounce the name you bear—must swear never to let it pass your lips, and to leave the city within a given time."

"I am to be driven off, am I?"

"Not that; you are simply to vanish."

"And leave the whole damnable game to you and your pards? I see through it. I won't go!"

Roland Rash folded his arms provokingly.

"Just as you please. You sign your own death warrant."

"I will do that rather than sign away the name my father gave me."

"Come, don't be stubborn. There's a good deal ahead of you yet."

"If you mean the memory that I once knocked under to a lot of villains compared with whom the scum of the mines are angels, I don't want a future of that sort."

A bitter laugh welled to Roland's lips, and he reached up to lower the light.

"Is that all?" asked Broncho Bill, with biting sarcasm.

"It is all. It is acceptance of these propositions, or it is death where you are."

The light went out, and Roland Rash paused where he was and tried to catch the grating sound of his prisoner's teeth.

He was not prepared for what followed.

He did not expect to hear the man

throw himself against the bars with all the ferocity of a caged tiger.

But this was exactly what he did.

The ferocious spring made Roland fall back with his heart in his throat and the next minute he had slammed the door and was running toward the larger room.

"Great Caesar! What if the tiger from Spokane had broken out?" he gasped, as he threw himself into the chair, not a vestige of color on his face and his eyes looking wild.

He breathed hard.

"We must finish him. We can't tame that animal from the mountains. He'll be a living menace all the time, and he will make it too hot for us. I must see the boys. I must see Bijou and Chocolate. We could have settled him in the Park when we had him in the sack. Why didn't we?"

Yes, why didn't they settle forever with William Swift, and that when they had him in their clutches and the river so handy to them?

It took Roland some little time to get back his lost nerve, but he conquered at last and arose to quit the house.

"He's safe enough, but he mustn't stay there long," he said to himself. "The game can't be won with that tiger liable to get out."

For a moment he was tempted to go back and look after his prisoner, but he changed his mind and quitted the place.

Outside he pulled his hat over his brow and walked rapidly away.

Not long afterward he turned up in another house, and Bijou stared at him with a smile.

"You're pale about the gills," said Bijou.

"Am I? Well, I've had a little fright, but it's all over now."

"You didn't meet the detective?"

Roland shook his head.

"Did you go to the house?"

"Yes," answered Bijou.

"With what success?"

"With none at all."

"Wasn't there anything in the safe?"

"No."

"That's strange. You was admitted by the girl?"

"Yes, and played a neat little trick on her, but it did no good."

Roland took a turn about the room, but turning suddenly on his heel, came back and stood over Bijou.

"See here. We must crush the man from the West."

"What? Isn't he safe where he is?"

"No."

"But he's there yet?"

"He is. Bijou, that man will get out. You and Chocolate must attend to him. A slow match and a good fuse—You know the rest, man."

Roland had all his nerves now, and he spoke with the coolness of the practiced scoundrel he was.

Bijou merely nodded.

CHAPTER XX.

KENT KEEN'S CAPTURE.

The Gotham detective had seen Roland enter the house from which he last emerged, and when the head of the conspiracy had started off he had the man of trails on his track.

Kent followed Roland till he entered the place where he met Bijou, and then he turned back.

Back to the other house he went.

Keen was anxious to see what had taken Roland to the place, and eager to find Jimsy and Ortiz, who might have fallen into the trap of the enemy, he resolved to enter the house himself.

It looked fast enough, but the cunning of the ferret effected an entrance, and in a little while he stood in the narrow hall.

The place was quite still.

Kent Keen stood for some time in the darkness, and then groped his way to the end of the hallway.

There he found a door which did not yield, and was apparently without a key-hole.

What lay beyond this closed portal he did not know, and after trying in vain to

get beyond it, he gave up the attempt and searched the rest of the house.

Very little rewarded him.

He found the rest of the place untenanted, and with very few evidences that it was often visited by any one.

More than once the detective listened, but no suspicious sounds came to his ears.

Half an hour later the detective was on the street again, and on his way back to his little room.

Late as the hour was, he found a figure at his door, and when he saw the face turned anxiously to him he touched his hat, for he stood before Myrtle Steele.

"I have been here some time," said the dead man's ward, when she had crossed the threshold and taken a seat in the ferret's room. "I have had a strange adventure."

Then she narrated her episode with the man who called himself Roger Takem, detective, and Kent listened with eagerness and interest.

"What did he carry off, miss?"

"That I cannot tell you. I do not know what was in the safe. I had not gone through all the documents there, and consequently cannot tell you what he found that suited him, if anything."

"He left no trail behind?"

Myrtle smiled.

"He must have left this," said she, taking from her pocket a ring, which she handed to the detective.

"I cannot but think that he lost this in the house, for I found it in my pocket when I came to. It may have fallen from his finger, for it is not mine."

Kent took the ring and bent toward the light.

"He visited the other parts of the house," continued Myrtle. "I discovered that he had been to Iran Steele's chamber and that he disarranged some articles there like a man would do in making a close search of the place. But nothing is missed in that part of the house, and, indeed, I cannot see that anything at all has vanished."

"He came to the house for a purpose, did that man. He is not Roger Takem. There is no such detective in New York, miss."

"I thought as much. I felt that he was playing a cool hand for a purpose all the time, but I seemed to be at his mercy from the first, and could not escape."

"He certainly had his way in everything, and if he carried off anything time will tell."

After hearing the girl's story and seeing her safely home, where he expressed the hope that she would be no more molested by the cool scoundrel, Kent Keen turned back.

He carried with him the ring found by Myrtle in her pocket, and in a short time he was looking into the face of Baxter Street Jot, whom he found in full possession of the office.

The boy, with his heels cocked up on the edge of the table in a highly independent manner, was taking his ease, but at sight of Kent he lowered them and burst into a laugh.

"That chap's a hummer," he exclaimed. "He is good at anything. Didn't I see him spring into the street half an hour ago and jerk a tipsy girl from under the feet of a team of cab horses?"

"Bijou?"

"The old, slick Bijou, the Meester Capper of Wall Street."

"You know where he lives, Jot?"

"Don't I? I think I could find him now, bue he's not at home."

"Where is he?"

"After d'e accident I tracked him to a place where he fights d'e tiger now and then, and he's good for d'e rest of the night there."

A smile of satisfaction came over the ferret's face.

"Show me his nest, Jot," said he.

"Do you want to enter it, Kent?"

"I might."

"You might find something there, but you had better be keeful. A slick duck is Bijou, and he's liable to give you trouble even if he is wrastlin' w'd d'e tiger in another part of d'e city."

"I'll run the risk, Jot. Come, to the house where you say Bijou lives."

It was not a very pretentious place, but the boy maintained that he had tracked Bijou thither, and, acting upon Kent's advice to go and watch the den of the tiger, Jot bolted off, leaving the detective to play out the hand he had taken up.

Keen soon found himself beyond the door of the house, and ready for the adventure, whatever it might be.

He did not find so many locked doors as in the other house, already visited upon Roland's heels, and in a little while he stood in what appeared to be a gentleman's bedroom.

On the desk which occupied one corner of the luxurious apartment lay a few sheets of paper, and the detective found upon them the business card of Sellers & Cahner, Brokers, Wall Street.

He gave the room a good, but a very careful, overhauling.

He went through the desk, which he managed to open, and after some time he fell back without much for his trouble.

"Bijou is cute," said Kent, with a smile. "He covers up his trails like an Indian, and he is almost too slick for the slickest."

In another room he found the elegant wardrobe of Bijou, or Meester Capper, and among the fine garments hung others which clearly indicated the purposes for which they were used.

Everything pointed to the double life which the man was leading, and the false beards, the old garments, the slouch hats, and, last of all, the many pairs of gloves, told a startling story.

It was a wardrobe which would have done credit to an actor, and the ferret was pleased to note everything that met his gaze.

He had made the search by a dim light which he extinguished at will, and at last he stood at the head of the stairs preparatory to descending.

As he was in the act of putting his foot upon the first step he heard a sound below, and the next moment a man came out of one of the lower rooms and stood before him.

In the light of the gas which Bijou had left burning for his home-coming, the detective saw this person.

He saw the well-rounded but dark face of a decided chocolate color, and he saw, too, that the keen eyes in the man's head were looking up at him.

For half a second the surprised look filled the eyes of the man below, and then he sprang to the bottom of the stairs.

"Stand where you are!" came up from the hall, and the detective was looking down into the muzzle of a revolver.

Chocolate had covered him.

All this had taken place in the fraction of a second, and the cool-headed ferret of New York stood at the mercy of as cool a man as ever held a foe at the muzzle of his six-shooter.

Chocolate's eyes fairly flashed, and he seemed to drop the revolver a trifle that it might cover exactly the detective's heart.

"Come down!" commanded Chocolate.

For a moment the surprised detective did not stir, and the command was repeated with more emphasis.

Kent descended, all the time keeping his eye on the enemy below and watching the pistol like a hawk.

There was no doubt of it; the man in the hall was Chocolate.

Halfway down the flight the dark-faced one ordered another halt, and Kent stood still.

"How do you like it?" grinned Chocolate.

Kent did not reply for a moment.

"I heard you in the house, and I thought I would show you a thing or two not on the bills according to your idea of this drama. I guess this is a little ticklish house-searching. You did not find anything—nothing but death!"

The detective seemed to bend forward, and his gaze settled upon Chocolate's face.

The hand which held the revolver did not quiver, the lips behind it had come firmly together, and the man himself was planted like a statue on the rug.

"You are just the man I've been looking for," continued Chocolate. "I couldn't wish for a better chance at you. You're dangerous to the little scheme, man, and a dead man never betrays any one."

"You are right," said Keen, speaking with as much coolness as that which characterized his enemy. "But in your eagerness to remove me you overlook the others who may know of my visit here to-night."

"The others? Why, man, there are no others now. They are all caged!"

"If you think so you may proceed. But, man, you take a great risk, for you must remember that you may be tracked by others who may not fail."

A laugh, low and significant, came up the stairs, and the face of Chocolate relaxed for a moment.

"Come on down," said he, stepping back, and Kent Keen descended once more.

At the bottom of the stairs he stopped, for the hand of Chocolate held the revolver nearly against his face, and he could now see the real color of the cheeks.

"Into the room yonder!" said the dark-faced one.

He had stepped back so as to give the detective a clear field to the door, and as Kent went forward a sudden thought flashed across his mind.

Why not make the battle for life then and there?

It was a thought which sent the blood like fire through his veins, and the following second he sprang at Chocolate with the fury of a wild beast.

The pistol-arm of the dark-faced demon was beaten down, and a muffled report followed as the bullet tore through Kent's coat, but almost at the same time Chocolate was thrown against the wall and pinned there by the hands of the New York Vidocq.

This turning of the tables in the twinkling of an eye startled Chocolate, and he could not find his tongue.

He was agile and quick, but the detective was his equal when it came to strength, and he held Chocolate against the wall, while with one hand he wrenched the smoking weapon from his grasp.

Neither man spoke for a minute, at the end of which time Chocolate was seated in a chair in the room off the hall looking up into the face of his foe.

"You share this house with Bijou?" asked Kent.

"Do you think so?"

"You are Chocolate, one of the heroes of the kidnapping."

The other's gaze seemed to wander away, and to rest on the wall beyond the chair.

"Come, you needn't keep silent with the coils of the law tightening around you," said the ferret. "You are one of the three who decoyed William Swift to the Park and literally bagged him there. It is a shrewd game, but it is up. You are in the toils, and in a short time you will see Bijou and Roland with you."

"It is false," cried Chocolate. "It is a bluff which cannot win."

"You may say so, if that gives you courage."

"No bluff goes with me."

The man in the chair laughed at his own words, and for a moment felt victorious.

Keen took a step toward him, and suddenly pulled from his pocket something that glittered.

At sight of the handcuffs Chocolate sprang up with a roar despite the menace, and threw up one hand.

His eager fingers seized the gas fixtures overhead, and before Kent could prevent, the room was as dark as Egypt, and in his ears rang his prisoner's triumphant laugh.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ATTACK IN THE DARK.

The silence which succeeded Chocolate's laugh was oppressive.

Keen stood at the table with the handcuffs dangling from his grasp, but with nothing in them.

The prisoner had turned the tables again, and the darkened room did not give Kent a chance to prepare for an attack.

Chocolate might be before him, or he

might be at the door ready to spring into the hall and leave him a prisoner in Bijou's retreat.

It was uncertainty and danger.

"How do you like that?" suddenly came a voice to the ferret's ears. "That's what I call a neat trick. Ha! ha! And you can make the most of it."

The voice seemed to come from near the door, and the detective turned in that direction.

He knew the distance to the portal, but he did not intend to risk his life in taking a step forward.

Therefore, he did not quit his place near the table, but waited for the next move of the man just in his power.

What would the wily Chocolate do?

The detective was not kept in suspense long.

Something, the wind of which he felt, whizzed past his head and seemed to break in twenty pieces against the wall beyond.

It was a chair which had been hurled like a bolas from the dark one's hands, and had missed the ferret by a hair.

Kent fell back, and, some distance from the table, waited for the next assault.

He had retreated without noise at all, and was ready to locate the cunning Chocolate by his next movement.

Chocolate evidently believed that his weapon had failed to bring down the game, and the detective heard him pick up a second chair, for he could have prevented it by putting out his hand, so close did he stand to the enemy.

In another second a second chair went whirling through darkened space with the same result, only it swerved a little to one side and crashed into a mirror in which Bijou was wont to finish his elaborate toilets.

A low laugh of disappointment parted Chocolate's lips, and then the door opened.

He was going out.

The opening of the door let a dim light into the room from the hall, and Kent got a glimpse of the enemy.

It was Chocolate's head and shoulders, and he bounded at these with the agility of a man-cat.

"Not yet," laughed a voice, as the shoulders were pulled out of Kent's very hands. "Not yet, my ferret."

The door shut in the detective's face, and Kent, catching the knob, wrenched it with all his might.

It did not yield, however, and he knew that Chocolate had locked him in.

This, however, did not give him any alarm, for he had been in similar situations before, and was not the man to worry over anything of the kind.

He heard Chocolate in the hall, and then heard the front door open and shut.

Keen went to the window and pulled the curtains aside.

The light of the nearest lamp fell against the building and over the pavement.

Kent saw the nimble Chocolate step from the doorway, and for half a second he watched his figure moving off.

He was gone.

The detective now turned to the matter of escape, knowing that the house could not hold him long, and within ten minutes he had clambered from one of the windows and dropped like a cat to the stones below.

Chocolate, of course, was already out of sight.

That individual had made himself scarce, and might have been seen waiting in a lower hallway for an answer to a message which he had just sent up-stairs.

At sight of the well-dressed man who came down the stairs, Chocolate sprang forward and exclaimed:

"Throw up the game, Bijou!"

Bijou started.

"Why, I'm right in it! Can't do it, boy."

"But you must. There's trouble."

"Where?"

"At home."

"At Roland's?"

"No; in your house. I left the detective there."

Instantly a sober expression crossed Bijou's features, and his gaze became fixed.

"Not in my house, Chocolate? The detective there?"

"Yes."

"But you left him dead, of course?"

"I tried to, but failed."

"Tell me."

Bijou leaned against the wall, and listened to Chocolate's story of the encounter, and when it was finished he coolly exclaimed:

"Of course he's not there now. He would not remain till I came home, nor until you played out the hand you are at liberty to play. I'll throw up the game, Chocolate."

Bijou disappeared up the stairs, but soon came back and took his companion's arm.

They went off together, followed by a boy, who all this time had used his ears to advantage.

Baxter Street Jot, set to watch Bijou, was carrying out his master's commands to the letter, and nothing was escaping his cunning.

They went back to the house, and in a short time found themselves inside.

A light was struck in the room where the encounter had taken place, and Chocolate cried out aghast at the destruction wrought by the chairs.

"That's all right," said Bijou. "If we win we can afford to lose a mirror and a bit of furniture. If we lose, we won't need such things. Eh, Chocolate?"

A sickly grin distorted Chocolate's face, and he became silent.

"So the ferret was here when you came in? I wonder if he found anything?"

Bijou crossed the room and removed a picture which occupied a place on the wall.

Throwing up a hand, he pressed a button set deftly in the plastering, and a little door slid to one side.

Into this opening Bijou thrust his hand, and drew out some papers, which he examined a moment in the light.

"Are they all right?" asked Chocolate.

"All O. K.," was the reply.

"That's good. I was afraid he had taken something."

Bijou looked at the documents again and then replaced them, after which he closed the little door and readjusted the picture.

Chocolate, who stood at the table, was watching him, but not with much interest, it seemed.

"I've got orders from the captain," said Bijou.

"Of what nature?"

"A sure match, and a slow fuse."

"Does he mean it?"

"Yes."

"What scares Roland now?"

"Roland fears the man from the West."

"Pshaw! He's safe."

"If he remains in the nest, yes; if he escapes, no."

"That's true; but look at the fastenings. All are there now but this meddlesome ferret, whose handcuffs I looked at to-night."

"Roland is anxious, and the command was imperative. It is to be a sure match and a slow fuse."

"We could arrange that," said Chocolate. "It would destroy the proofs against the little scheme, but it would create a sensation."

"It would set the detectives at work, but they would not get anything for their pains."

"Not unless this one knew something."

Bijou's face colored.

"We must crush this man! We must beat this shrewd and troublesome enemy. You and I, Chocolate, must take him in hand."

"I'm ready."

"The house first—the sure match and a slow fuse!" said Bijou.

Chocolate's unmerciful face did not show a sign of pity.

"When shall it be?" he merely asked.

"To-morrow night."

"Should we wait that long?"

"Why not? You can keep out of Kent Keen's way that long, can't you?"

"I can try," grinned Chocolate.

"You must," was the rejoinder. "To-morrow night we meet for the grand coup."

We can arrange the minor details at the time we meet here.

"Why here? This house may be watched."

"At Roland's, then."

"Let it be at Roland's."

Chocolate, half an hour later, slipped from Bijou's place, and, creeping in the shadows of great buildings, sought another place, where he sneaked to bed in a small room.

He stretched himself out upon the pallet with a chuckle for the manner in which he had outwitted the detective, and went to sleep with a smile of triumph at the corners of his dark lips.

Chocolate was cool and full of courage.

The night wore on, to find Bijou at the table in the room where we saw him last.

He did not quit the place till he had covered several large sheets of paper with writing, and these he added to the documents in the hole in the wall.

When another morning came, and the light of day stole into the house, Bijou went down-stairs and into the room.

He had passed a sleepless night, as his eyes proved, and his nerves were on edge.

"It must have been a dream, of course," said he, aloud, as he crossed the carpet toward the wall. "Twice I thought I heard a noise in this room, but—"

He jerked the picture aside and pressed the button madly.

The door slid back, and he thrust in his hand.

The place was empty!

A cry like a sound from a wild beast parted his lips, and he sprang forward.

Eyes and hand searched the hole in the wall, but without results; it was tenanted by nothing.

"Robbed!" cried Bijou. "Why didn't I come down and catch the thief at work? I thought it was a dream—a nightmare—but it was the terrible truth. They have robbed me. I can't play out my hand if I lose those papers. I must have them back. I am going to have them, and with them your life, Kent Keen. Do you hear me? With them your life, sleuth of the trail!"

He stood before the open door with a bloodless face and clinched hands.

"I know who robbed me. It was you, Kent Keen. Your blood for this midnight play!"

But for once, at least, Bijou was mistaken.

He stood a little while longer in the room, and then shut up the secret compartment.

He almost tottered from the chamber when he left it.

Up-stairs he went, and steadied his nerves with a glass of claret, after which he made a hasty toilet before the broken mirror.

This time he did not go down into Wall Street to the office of Sellers & Cahner, but turned suddenly into a dingy little side street and plunged into a poor-looking building.

He ran up-stairs and pushed his way into a room.

Chocolate sat up in bed with a startled look on his face, and the hand of Bijou fell upon his shoulder.

"I've been plundered, Chocolate!" he cried.

"You? Robbed?"

"Robbed, and by the detective! He came back, did this vulture of the trail."

"And took—"

"Yes, he plundered the hole in the wall where I kept my valuables. He is the thief!"

Chocolate's teeth met.

"You know what's to be done, Chocolate," cried Bijou. "I must have two things."

"The packet for one—"

"And his life for the other!" And Bijou sprang up and stood before Chocolate like a madman.

CHAPTER XXII.

A HERCULES TO THE RESCUE.

During these last somewhat exciting events a man who stood in the very blackness of darkness was breathing hard and his hands were at work on a number of iron bars.

These bars were stretched across a door like the web of a spider, but without much uniformity.

If the light of day could have reached this person it would have revealed a face still handsome, though haggard.

"This is worse than the ten days in the old Santa Rosa mine," said the man, in a husky voice, which sounded strangely in that place. "It is tenfold worse than the experience of the lost miners in the gold shafts of the Gray Horse Lode. They escaped from that place in time, and I got out of the Santa Rosa pit; but here—here I am a rat in a city trap and without a friend. Where's the detective? Where's Kent Keen? Is he in the plot? He sent me to that little hotel, and his friend whom I met at the ferry—Jimsy something—guided me thither, and then the three men came with the slick story which opened the infernal trap for me."

He ceased at last, out of breath, and leaned against the bars which he had failed to break, though his Samsonian powers had bent them.

This man, as the reader has suspected ere this, was William Swift, the missing miner.

Broncho Bill had found his dungeon a dark and dismal place, and the longer he stood amid the almost palpable gloom the less seemed to grow his hopes of freedom.

After catching his breath, he went to work again.

He had seen and talked with the sleek Roland; he had been told that he was as one buried forever, that he was not known to have come from the West, and, lastly, that he would never be found by the shrewd ferrets of the metropolis.

With a future like this before him, no wonder he tugged with all his might at the irons, and that he resolved to force his way from that subterranean hell or perish in the attempt.

Some hours had passed since Roland's departure.

The footsteps of the man of plots had died away and he had been left in the abode of darkness to await his doom.

When would it come?

He could guess if he could fix his mind long enough upon it in the solitude of the cell.

"It's death here or vengeance outside!" cried Broncho Bill. "It shall not be death if William Swift can prevent it."

With renewed strength he went to work once more, and this time he grasped the bent bars, and threw all his powers into the battle for life.

The strength of an Ajax seemed to take possession of his arms, and he pulled back and twisted at the irons as prisoner had never done before him.

"That's something!" suddenly cried the giant from Spokane, as he fell back upon the floor with a piece of one of the bars in his dark and bleeding hands.

He threw the piece at his feet and sprang again to the attack.

He worked with hope now, and with the anathemas which came from between his clinched teeth he broke one after another of the bars, and stood at last with his bare hands on the door itself.

"Keep me in here, will you?" he cried. "Kill the man from Red Feather if you can! Now, sir, I will see who is the best man—you or me."

He breathed better now, and against the wall he waited till he was rested.

Then he went to the door once more.

It was locked, of course, but with the irons broken it would not resist him very long.

He tried the latch, but it resisted him; then, with a laugh, which was still upon his lips, he leaped through the air and fell against the portal, shattering it the first attack.

William Swift fell headlong upon the steps beyond the door, but he soon recovered.

The house was still enough now, and he stood erect and wondered where he was.

Having been carried to the place in a bag like a cat, he did not know in what part of the city he was, but he would soon find out.

Doors would not keep him in long.

The man breathed like an eagle which has just burst the bonds of captivity.

He groped his way to the end of the hall and found a door there.

But he had passed another door and turned back.

Perhaps Roland was in the house.

If so, vengeance.

The door in the hall was not locked, and Broncho Bill found himself in a room which was large and dark.

He found a gas burner, and on the table a lot of matches.

With eagerness he struck one and took in the dimensions of the room and its furniture.

"A nest!" said he, with a grin, as he noticed that the appointments of the place were in keeping with some man's wealth. This is his house. He will come back. Why not lie in wait for him? Why not wait here till he returns?"

He might have blown out the lucifer and sat down if at that moment a strange noise, which seemed to come up through the floor at his feet, had not startled him.

He looked down.

There was nothing there but the carpet, and his face assumed a puzzled expression.

"It sounded like a voice," cried the man from the West. "It seemed to be half muffled, like a voice in the heart of a mine, and—There it goes again!"

He got down and put his ear to the carpet.

In another minute he was out in the hall and had reached the door at one end of it.

Locks were nothing to the man from Spokane now.

He wrenched the door open and found a flight of dark, damp steps, leading, as it seemed, into the bowels of the earth.

Down those steps he went, and landed against a second door.

Upon this he struck in his rage and then listened.

There were voices beyond.

"A woman, by Jove!" cried the man. "A woman shut up in this trap as I was!"

"Who's thar?" he then demanded.

"It is I—Ortiz Orth. I am here with Jimsy. Jimsy is nearly at the end of his tether," was answered.

"Jimsy? Why, that's the man who took me to the detective."

"It's the man from Spokane, Ortiz. D'at's his voice for all d'e world!"

"Yes, I am William Swift—the man from Spokane!"

"Then for God's sake open the door!"

"I will if it's made of iron. Stand back!"

"Stand back, Jimsy!" was repeated inside. "That man is at large and will save us."

"I will or die!" came from Broncho's Bill, and the next moment he launched himself against the door, which shook and then fell inward.

"Better'n a batterin' ram," said a weak, but a masculine voice, as the stalwart figure of Swift landed in total darkness. "Wot's d'e use o' havin' such things when d'at man's around?"

With one of the matches which he had appropriated in the room overhead, the stalwart man struck a light, and saw at his feet the forms of a man and a woman—Jimsy and Ortiz.

Jimsy, white in face and haggard in expression, smiled his welcome.

"We didn't expect the millennium would come in jes' d'is way, but it's welcome all d'e same. Eh, Ortiz?"

The girl, full of thankfulness, laid her hand on the Westerner's sleeve.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

"Beyond that wall, I guess," and he pointed toward one of the walls of the dungeon.

"And never heard us?"

"Never."

"Well, it's all right, now," said Jimsy. "We've been here a long time—it seems a year to me. But now for revenge!"

"You are right," and Swift touched the other's arm. "I live for that!"

Out of the den and up the steps they went.

The man from Spokane led the way, and

in the room where he had heard the noise beneath they halted a moment.

"Whose house is this?" he asked.

"It is Roland's," answered the girl.

"And Roland is—"

"D'e head man what decoyed you from d'e hotel," assured Jimsy.

"I know him. I will see him later. Where do the others live?"

"I can show you."

"All right. I will let you show me, but you must stand aside while I take vengeance."

While without day was breaking, within the house was dark enough.

As Swift started toward the front door Jimsy Curt interposed.

"D'ey may be on d'e watch. We kin get away by d'e back doors."

"You are right," replied the Westerner. "We will go that way, for we want to steal a march on this gang."

Beyond the house of terrors at last, with the light of day on their faces, the prisoners felt like giving vent to their feelings in an outburst of thankfulness.

Ortiz smiled and pressed the hard hand of the man from Spokane, for instead of finding and freeing him, he had freed them.

In the alley at the foot of the cramped back yard they paused, and the Westerner looked nonplussed for a moment.

"I dare not go to the hotel," he said. "If they missed me they might look for me there."

"You can hide with mother," suggested Ortiz.

"With her, then," was the response.

A few minutes later the man from the Pacific was safely hidden in the little domicile in Midnight Alley, and Ortiz had told her mother all they thought best for her to relate about the adventures of the past few days.

Jimsy, well disguised, had gone out to look up his principal, and Swift stood at the front window with the curtains parted, looking down upon the motley life of that close-jammed quarter of the great city.

Now and then he would pace the floor like an impatient wolf; his face would suddenly flush and grow white again, and the women, mother and daughter, saw his hands shut spasmodically, while he seemed to breathe forth the vengeance which filled his heart.

Jimsy Curt took a roundabout route to Kent's room.

He had well disguised himself, for, while he did not fear detection, he thought it best to be doubly cautious.

He took note of everything, and not a face passed him that he did not eye as if it was that of his deadliest foe.

He pulled up in the building at last.

In another moment he would be with the Dead-Game Detective, and the man who never failed on the trail would be the avenging spirit of the plot.

Up the stairs bounded Jimsy, eager to tell his story.

He ran nimbly down the hall, and burst into the room, but only to fall back with a cry of horror, for, lying halfway across the table, was the body of his master.

Jimsy stared as if his eyes would fly from his head.

"D'ye've been here, too," were the first words he uttered, and then he was at the detective's side.

Blood was on the table, and a half-dried pool was on the floor at the foot of the chair.

Jimsy felt faint, but at that moment the door opened and before him, with a face bleached to a sudden whiteness, stood Baxter Street Jot, Kent Keen's little spy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GATHERING WAR CLOUD.

The face of the detective's assistant was livid with rage as he gazed at Jot.

"Who did this?" he demanded.

"Yer don't suppose I did it?" he cried.

"I didn't say yer did; I only asked for information."

"Let that go, now, and look after Kent. He may be worth a dozen dead men yet."

The two went to work, and were rewarded by seeing Kent open his eyes, and

in a little while he was sitting bolt upright in the chair, staring at the pair.

"I told yer so," asserted Jot. "I thought he wasn't dead. There's vengeance in the Dead-Game Detective yet."

It was some time before Keen talked, and then he detailed his last adventure.

He was in the room alone when the thunderbolt fell.

It came when he did not look for anything of the kind and was wholly unprepared for it.

The door, which he had not locked in anticipation of Jot dropping in, was softly opened, and he looked up to see before him a masked man, in whose hand was gripped a revolver.

Eyes flashed fire behind the mask, and as the ferret rose to receive his enemy, the weapon spoke and he dropped limp into the chair.

Consciousness left him, and he knew no more till his friends Jimsy and Jot brought him out of the shadow of death.

The bullet intended for his heart had missed its mark and the wound made by it, while looking serious, was, in fact, little more than a flesh one.

Blood had flowed and dyed the carpet at his feet and stained the table.

It was one of his narrow escapes from the hands of his enemy, and the ferret smiled when he looked into the faces of his friends and asked them how they had fared.

Jimsy was eager to tell his story and its startling nature was unsuspected.

"So the man from Spokane is found?" said Kent.

"He found himself," was the reply. "He came to us and saved Ortiz and me in the nick of time."

"Out of the trap, Jimsy. That's good! He is safe where he is unless the spies track him to Midnight Alley."

"Ortiz and her mother will watch over him," was the reply. "The man from the far West is safe in the old house, and if attacked, woe to those who come within reach of his arms."

Having dressed his wounds, the detective said:

"The links are nearly all in our hands. I will find the man who called to see me with the revolver. Never mind, I will lay hands on the sleek tiger of the town."

"Was it Roland?" asked Jimsy.

"No."

"Chocolate?"

The ferret shook his head.

"Kent knows," put in Jot. "Let him keep the secret. He will find the bloke and see that he gets what he deserves. You must wait, Jimsy."

Jimsy went back to Mrs. Orth's, in Midnight Alley, and the detective and his little friend and spy were left alone.

"It was the cool-headed Bijou," said Kent. "I am almost sure of it. He came with murder in his heart, and it was not his fault that the leaden messenger went somewhat wide of its mark. We will attend to Bijou."

In another part of the city, with his face anxiously turned toward the door, sat a man in a chair under an electric globe.

He was well dressed, and seemed to be waiting for some one.

It was Bijou, the man of two names and the double life, and while he waited he now and then sent white rings of smoke to the ceiling.

No one seemed to come.

He was in the best room in Roland's house, and while he kept his vigils there he seemed wholly at peace with the world and looked like one on the threshold of a new triumph.

Had Bijou found the missing papers, or did he know where to put his hand on them before he slept?

All at once he sprang up and darted from the room.

"I'll try the last place," said he. "If he found them he will hide them there."

He ran up the steps in the hall and opened a door on the next floor.

In a moment he stood near a large mirror, which he moved to one side, while he reached his hand behind it and seemed to feel for something supposed to be there.

But he drew it forth disappointed, as he had done from the niche in the wall of his own house, and with another look he swung the mirror back in its place and turned away.

"After all, he may not have committed the robbery," he said, in low tones, as he left the room and went back to the parlor below. "I must have them. The detective did not get them, for I searched his room. If not taken by Roland for a purpose, who did it?"

Bijou waited a while longer, and a key turned at last in the lock beyond the room.

He watched the door like a hawk, and when it opened he nearly sprang to his feet, for Chocolate, and not Roland, had come in.

"The nest! The empty dungeons!" cried Chocolate, his face nearly white, and his words spoken in gasps.

Bijou looked at him with consternation depicted on his face and his eyes enlarged.

"The empty dungeons, man?" he cried.

"What mean you?"

"They're empty, I say."

"In the nest?"

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"But it is true. I have just come from there."

Bijou was on his feet, and the next moment was leaning forward, transfixing Chocolate with his gaze.

"Who let them out?"

"I don't know."

"Is the man from Spokane gone?"

"Yes."

"And the others?"

"The nest is empty. The match and the fuse will avail us nothing now. We put it off too long."

Bijou seemed to stand like a man on the edge of a precipice.

"The game is lost," moaned Chocolate, sinking into a chair. "The play is out. Now to save our necks."

"Fool!" cried Bijou, flashing up like powder. "The detective is on the trail no longer."

"What's that?"

"Kent Keen is out of the way."

"Who did it?"

The look which came to Bijou's eyes was answer enough, but it did not satisfy Chocolate.

"Go and see for yourself. You will find him dead in his den."

"Not now, since the nest is empty. I wouldn't venture down there for the world. The man from out West may have gone thither by this time—"

"And found him?"

"Exactly. I don't go down there."

"Coward!" cried Bijou. "You don't intend to show the white feather when we have no one to fight now but the minor spy? What is Jimsy to men of our stamp? He isn't even discreet, and we can trap him. The other—the man from Spokane—is not up to city ways, and ten chances to one if what he has already passed through doesn't scare him out of sight."

"That man-tiger from the West? Never!" exclaimed Chocolate. "We shall see more of him—that is, if we are fools enough to let him find us."

The finger of Bijou pointed to the door. He was cool and resolute.

"Go, coward. Go and bury yourself in some dark place where the light of day never comes. As for me, I fight it out and win the prize."

Chocolate's gaze fell and he stood up and looked over at his companion.

"I stay," he said. "I stay and stand by you, Bijou."

"You'll find me at the desk to-morrow as cool as a cucumber. The secret is ours, Chocolate. The man from the West cannot win the game. The note will never be paid, and the detective—"

There was a sound in the hall, and both men looked toward the door.

In came Roland.

A quick look passed between the two men as the head of the plot came forward and dropped into his chair.

"You will make your first visit to-morrow," he said, looking at Chocolate.

"To Myrtle?"

"Yes. Didn't you promise me that you would make the girl your wife?"

Chocolate bowed.

"But the girl might object," he said.

"She is in the toils. Wait till I pull the cord, and she will dance. I have the secret in my hands."

"The secret, captain?"

"The secret of her birth," said he, with a triumphant smile. "I know all."

Bijou, with a black look, said nothing, but waited for Roland to proceed.

"I hold her future in my hands," he went on. "She dare not resist you."

Chocolate seemed to reflect a moment.

One more glance at Bijou and that worthy's head dropped approvingly.

"The nets need mending, captain," said the man with the dark face. "The last fish have broken through."

Roland started, and gave Chocolate a quick, uneasy look, and waited for him to go on.

"In other words, the nest holds no one just now."

"What, is the man from Spokane out?" cried the handsome head of the gang.

"He is free."

"Then we must strike quick. Better luck next time. You are not afraid, boys?"

Then it was that Bijou left his chair and came over to his partner with a gliding motion.

His face, suddenly grown white and vengeful, almost touched Roland's cheek.

"You must play the game out yourself from this point," he said.

Roland fell back in his chair with a slight change of color, and his mouth opened.

"What's that, Bijou?" he cried.

"From this point you must play out the game alone, unless—"

Bijou looked at Chocolate and that dark-faced man slipped from the room.

This left man and master alone.

The hand of Bijou fell upon Roland's arm and tightened while it rested there.

"You heard me, Captain Roland," continued Bijou. "I don't speak in riddles."

"But I don't understand you."

"Come, give me the papers. It was you, after all."

"Me?"

"You are the robber. You are the man who plundered my room and carried off the papers. Come, give them up or go out and face fate alone!"

The face of Roland got its old color, and he suddenly stood up, facing his lieutenant.

"If I play it out what will become of you?" he exclaimed.

A bitter laugh parted Bijou's lips.

"Oh," said he, "I can live without you, but you—you can't survive a day without my help!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BOSS VILLAIN'S PLAY.

Brighter and more beautiful grew the new day.

The streets of Gotham got back their throngs, and the sun, creeping higher and higher, gilded the tallest spires and warmed the stones of the narrowest avenues.

The night just passed had been an eventful one in more ways than one, not only to the characters of our romance, but to thousands of others who prey on their fellow-men in the metropolis.

Myrtle Steele, seated alone in the handsome parlor of her home, heard the bell, and sent the maid to the door.

Had the oily, robbing Roger Takem come back?

For a little while she heard no sounds in the hall, and then the door opened and some one came in.

The room, a little dark, did not let her see at first in full the face of her caller, but when she got a fair look she started.

He was a tall, well-dressed man, not a bit like the so-called ferret.

He bowed to Myrtle at the door, and she rose as he came forward.

She had seen that face before; she had seen it on the street and in that very house.

A sight of it recalled the night of Iran Steele's death.

Yes, it was the same face and the identical black eyes.

Roland Rash stood before the beauty in black, and she felt a strange thrill, even to her finger tips.

For all this she did not insult the man, but offered him a chair and saw him calmly take it.

"I will not detain you," he said, in a cool, business-like manner. "I am here to see you in private."

"This is privacy. There are no ears beyond the walls of this room."

Roland's glance came back to Myrtle, and he resumed:

"What I shall say to you may be in the nature of a surprise, miss, but I am not responsible for that."

Myrtle fixed her gaze upon him, wondering at his consummate coolness, which recalled the visit of the man called Roger Takem.

"You are old enough to take a life partner, miss," he went on, and a blush came quickly to Myrtle's lips.

"Did you come hither to tell me this?" she asked, with rising indignation.

"Partly so, and partly to say that I have the honor of finding a husband for you."

He was the acme of coolness, the very personification of villainy unmasked.

He find a husband for her?

"It is true. I have found a husband for you, miss, and am here for your acquiescence," Roland went on.

"But, sir, you must remember that I am able to choose for myself and without any outside interference."

"Not in this case, if you please. You will listen to me."

The millionaire's ward threw a look of pleading toward the door, but Roland, immovable, intercepted it.

"You may not know Gerald Green," said he. "You may never have heard of Chocolate—"

"That man," broke in Myrtle. "You don't mean that I am to wed that person?"

"You know him, then?"

"It is the dark-faced man—the man concerned in the plot. I can't think of him."

"But you must, miss. You must listen to reason."

"I will listen to no proposition in which the name of that man is considered."

"Wait. Don't consider yourself above the gentleman," replied Roland. "He is your superior, if anything. Chocolate will make you a good husband; and, if he has a few wild streaks in his nature, a life of wedded bliss will tend to correct them."

"Enough!"

Myrtle was on her feet, her eyes on fire and her bosom rising and falling with indignation.

Roland Rash, without a sign of temper, sat still.

He seemed to know his victim, and bided his time.

"You have heard me!" cried the girl. "I cannot listen. I will not."

"Then, miss, I will turn you out of this house upon the streets of New York, a branded outcast!"

She gave him a look of incredibility, and smiled.

Was the man mad?

"I will give to the world the story of your ancestry, and will blight your life on the threshold of happiness."

"You will do all this, you say, unless I consent to marry the man whom you have found for me—one of your own band of vultures."

"You are complimentary in your terms," said Roland, with a smile, while he watched her. "Never mind. You will marry Gerald Green, or Chocolate, as we call him, or you will walk from this house blasted in fame and wrecked for life."

"Let it come!"

"You don't mean it, miss."

"Do your worst! I will meet the storm. I will face the tempest when it comes."

She was cool and collected now. Her face had got back its natural color, and her nerves seemed as strong as ever.

Roland Rash had been disappointed in the girl; he did not expect to see such nerve as she had shown.

"You refuse him, then?" he said, at length.

"Now and forever!" cried Myrtle.

"You will let me play out the hand I hold?"

"As soon as you can—the sooner the better. It was your tool who robbed me, was it?"

"My tool, miss?"

"Roger Takem, so called, was your tool, was he not? He found some papers in the safe or on the desk after he had rendered me unconscious? It was the work of a villain. As such it shall not be furthered by me. I refuse to become the wife of this chocolate-colored rascal of the deepest dye."

Once more the old smile of triumph came to Roland's face, and rested there.

"The blow will fall, then," he said. "You are not prepared to meet it."

"As well as I ever will be! You forget that I am not without friends."

"Where are they, and what can they do?"

"Wait and see," answered Myrtle.

"You are powerless to meet the tempest. You are but a woman with the weak nerves of your sex, and you dare not make a fight against the overwhelming evidence which I can produce against you and your past."

She did not speak; she did not know what weapon this cool scoundrel held in his hand.

"Why, miss, if I spoke you would be shunned by those whom you have called friends!"

"It is false!"

"You would find upon your garments the smell of the felon's cell."

"I don't believe it!"

"You would see in your visions a babe nurtured in the prison where the guilty abide. You would find on your very dresses the taint of crime. You—"

With a wild cry Myrtle Steele tottered back and dropped into the chair at the table.

Her face lost its color and grew deathly white; she looked at Roland Rash in her helplessness, and saw on his face the expression of a heartless villain.

He leaned toward her, and his voice dropped to a hissing whisper:

"It is true. I hold the proofs, miss, and no one else can wield them. I hold in my hands the destiny of the future and the happiness which you can purchase by a word. You must become the wife of Gerald Green, or pass down the rounds of the ladder to land in the slough of disgrace and infamy."

She did not seem to hear him.

"I give you three minutes, miss," he went on. "I will not quit this room till I have your reply."

Myrtle heard this.

Her half-closed eyes opened, a spasm of indignation swept across her face, and her hand came up with sudden emphasis.

"I cannot."

He looked at her like a serpent for a moment.

"You refuse, then—absolutely refuse? You have pride, miss. You have a million at your command. You will be the richest wife in this city. You will have your past kept in the dark and the future will be bright. What if society stares at your husband? You will learn to love him. Chocolate is not such a bad man. He will make a model husband if you hold him a little in leash. I will help you in that direction. I will always be near to see that the course of true love runs smooth under your roof."

"Silence!"

The hand of Myrtle Steele almost fell upon the man's before her.

She stood erect once more.

"The door is yonder, tempter!" she cried. "Go! In another moment I will kill you where you stand, even as you killed Iran Steele. I will slay you as I would a sneaking dog. You have my answer. Come disgrace, infamy, death even! I will not consent to the unholy union you offer."

Roland bit his lips beneath his mustache. He stood before the beautiful girl a moment, and then fell back.

He felt that he had failed.

The play had cost him much, but it was not to be reconsidered.

"As you killed Iran Steele, my benefactor, you and your friend, so will I strike you down in this house if you remain. Remember that the hand of the avenger is on your trail. Remember that as there is a God in Heaven, the guilty are to be punished by the relentless man-hunter."

"I beg your pardon, miss; the detective is harmless."

"Then you have killed him likewise," and the hand of Myrtle fell at her side. "It is your work, even as that night's dreadful doings in this house belong to you. Go, I say. I shall ring for help!"

She put up her hand for the electric button, and he retreated.

"One moment—"

"Not a second, monster. You cannot play out the hands of villainy under this roof. You have simply unmasked yourself. I shall ring for help, and then ends forever the game you would play. The mask has fallen from your face. You are the man called Roland. You belong to the conspirators who have stained their hands with human blood and who are hunted by the detectives."

He saw her hand seize the cord, and not knowing who might bound into the room at the signal, Roland stepped into the hall, his face still turned upon her.

Myrtle waited.

She heard him open the door and quit the house.

She heard his feet on the step, and then a sudden faintness seemed to take possession of her.

"My God! What does that scoundrel know?" she exclaimed. "What is the terrible weapon he holds in his hands? What was the secret of the steel safe?"

She fell into the chair and grew whiter than ever.

Roland looked back at the door with the coolness of the consummate scamp.

"Some other time," said he. "She'll come round all right, especially when she hears of what Bijou did. As for the empty nest, we are too much for the man from Spokane, and the spy who was in the trap—we can match him when his master is out of the way. It is a game for wealth. It is still in our hands, and I shall see that Chocolate has a rich wife whose purse-strings shall open whenever I crook my finger."

One more glance, and he quitted the vicinity, but his eyes seemed to retain their victorious look despite the fact that his last play had been unsuccessful.

Perhaps if the keen Roland could have penetrated the future he would not have been so sanguine; he might have dropped his feathers, for the hand of the avenger was reaching out for the best play of its career.

CHAPTER XXV.

A DANGEROUS FLY.

The man from Spokane chafed under the forced confinement of Midnight Alley.

True, he had comfortable quarters, so far as they went, but he pined to be "on the war-path," as he expressed it, and to run to earth, with the help of the ferret, the men who had played such a dark game against him and his fortunes.

William Swift, or Broncho Bill, mourned the loss of the fifty-thousand-dollar note, but he consoled himself with the hope that he would make up for that in revenge.

Ortiz told him a great deal about the city and its ways, and she went out now and then to see the detective, but did not succeed in finding him in.

At last Broncho Bill told the girl that he would go himself, for he believed that with the directions she had proffered he could find the office and the detective as well.

Ortiz did not take well to this suggestion, but at last consented with the understanding that the man from Spokane should first disguise himself ere he ventured forth.

It was night when the Westerner, full of hopes, set out for the ferret's room.

He was watched, even guided, a certain distance by the girl, and was then left to shift for himself.

In the brief rest which he had found in the humble home in Midnight Alley he

had recruited his strength and was eager to see the city trail by gaslight.

For some time the lights had for the man from Spokane a fascination which he could not overcome.

The glare of the streets nearly blinded him, and at times he found himself turning aside to let the swarming crowd of pedestrians pass him.

"It's an endless crowd," said William Swift to himself. "It will never get past and I can't wait. I must find the detective to-night, and we must lay a snare for the band."

With this desire at the bottom of his heart he pushed boldly out, and was soon bolting through the crowds in a manner which called universal attention to him.

All at once he ran against a man who stopped and looked after him.

"I know them shoulders," said this individual, stopping and gazing at the man who had just passed like a whirlwind. "I've seen them before, and then I felt how much power they contained. It was in the Park when we netted the bird who got out of the cage. That man is the enemy from Spokane."

The speaker followed William Swift.

Not for a moment did he lose sight of his quarry, and when he saw him turn into the street where the detective lived a smile crossed his face.

"By Jove! this is luck!" he cried. "Who could wish for anything better than this? It's playing right into our hands again, and all I have to do is to tangle him up, which I can accomplish now."

Cat-like, he was at the Westerner's heel, and even if William Swift had looked back, he might not have seen the menacing danger.

The man from Spokane kept on till he reached the building, and after a moment's inspection, he ran up the stairs in the hall and vanished.

The tracker drew near and listened.

His face was at the door, which had been left open by the eager man, and there he remained till he heard noises above.

"Not at home? This is gall," he heard a voice say, and the next moment the stalwart figure of the Westerner appeared at the top of the flight; he fell back and from a secluded spot waited for him to come down.

In a little while Broncho Bill came down to the sidewalk, looking disappointed, and the other watched him with the eye of a lynx.

The man from Spokane did not know what to do.

He seemed to be at a stand so far as future plans were concerned; he did not know whether to retrace his steps to Midnight Alley or to wait and watch in the vicinity for Kent Keen.

"Whatever he does he will fall into my hands," muttered the watcher. "I will close in on him and settle the whole matter in a little while."

Broncho Bill started off at last with the same keen tracker at his heels, determined to run him to cover.

But ten minutes later the tall form of the man from Spokane stood under a lamp and the watcher drew off and regarded him.

Broncho Bill was bewildered.

He was on the edge of Union Square, and the lights of that breathing place, flaring as they did in the night wind, seemed to attract him in an unaccountable manner.

"If he crosses I have the fly," said the other one.

Bill crossed the street and sauntered through the square.

It was a cool night for meditation on the benches, but this did not discourage him.

Among the leaves which the winds had swept from the trees he found a settee and sat down.

"In the snare," said the watcher. "I have him now, even as I once had the ferret."

The trailer now came up.

At first the eyes of the man from Spokane did not see him, and it was not till he was squarely before him that he saw him at all.

"I say; could you give me a light?" asked the tracker.

The hand of the Westerner went direct to his pocket, and he brought out several matches, which he handed to the other.

"It's a little chilly," resumed the spider, as he drew a little closer.

"Kinder cool, but that's nothing to what we'll have by an' by."

The spider put one foot upon the edge of the settee and became confidential.

His face he kept in shadow, and the man from Spokane noticed that he dallied with the matches and did not strike one.

"Could you tell me where Broadway is?" he asked.

Broadway?

Even the unsophisticated man from the West was startled by this queer question.

He had not been in the great city very long, but he knew where Broadway was.

In fact, he had just trod its stones, and he wondered who this man could be that he wanted to know the whereabouts of the greatest street in the world.

"You can't live in the city," said Bill.

"I do not. I'm a stranger here, just got in, and if I could find Broadway, why—"

"I haven't been here long myself," put in the man from Spokane. "But I've seen enough of New York to know where Broadway is."

"It's more than I've done, by Jove!" laughed the other, as his foot dropped to the ground and he saw the Westerner getting up.

The figure of Broncho Bill rose nearly a head above the other.

"Come!" said he.

At that moment he got a fair glimpse of the stranger's face.

It was smooth and cleanly cut.

But there was something about the eyes and the chin which attracted his attention.

He had seen eyes like those and under startling circumstances.

He recalled the ride to the Park; he thought of the deadly decoy from the quiet little hotel, and over him rushed the terrible suspicion that at least one of the spiders of the city was playing for him again.

"Come!" he repeated, and despite his coolness his voice had changed.

They started off together, and another glance confirmed Bill in his suspicions.

He knew the man now.

There was no mistaking the eyes which glittered behind the drooping black lashes, and the chin told him even more.

He had seen that same face which had worn a black mustache on the sensual lips.

From what Jimsy had told him this was Bijou.

This was the man whose hands had helped to put him into the black bag.

The thought rankled in his bosom. It seemed to burn its way through his veins.

Broncho Bill bided his time.

Did Bijou suspect?

Did he feel that the fly was about to turn on the spider and break the web of his spinning?

They had not gone far when Broncho turned.

He saw a quick movement of the other's hand, and in an instant his own right one closed on the man's wrist.

"I'll show you more than Broadway," he hissed, leaning forward and ending his sentence with a laugh. "I will show you more than you will care to see. I know you!"

The other drew back, but the arm stopped him.

"I saw you when you decoyed me from the hotel. You are one of the three. You must be Bijou."

"I don't know Bijou. I don't know you."

"Time will tell. Come on. You can't get away from Broncho Bill."

"Unhand me! Don't you know that I can call a policeman?"

The big man laughed once more.

"Call him. Where shall we find him? We'll hunt one up. Shall we?"

The very last thing the smaller man wanted to do.

"It's not far to his office. We may find Kent Keen in now. We'll see."

What, go back to the rooms of the detective?

It was the last thing Bijou thought of.

But the hand of iron was at his wrist, and with it there what could he do but obey?

William Swift felt that he had turned the tables on one of his enemies.

He was not disposed to show mercy, for when had the band shown any to him?

"In a few moments," said he. "If you're not Bijou, why, we'll let you go, but if you are—"

There was a quick and powerful spring on the prisoner's part, and but for the hand of the man from Spokane he would have jerked loose and been off.

People stared at the two men knit together, as it were, by human fingers.

Bill took no notice of the stares, but clung to his man and fairly dragged the frothing Bijou over the stones.

On Broadway they did not stop, and the prisoner seemed to give over his efforts when he looked into his captor's face and allowed himself to be pulled along with impunity.

Bill knew the way back to Kent Keen's room.

Once more he plunged into the hall and up the steps.

He ran down the hall on the second floor and burst into the room which he had visited a short time before.

As the door flew open a startled cry was heard and a boy who half filled the detective's chair sprang to his feet.

It was Baxter Street Jot.

"Where's Mr. Keen?"

Jot shook his head, his gaze all the time riveted upon Bijou.

"You don't know, eh?" cried William Swift. "Look at this pard, boy. Look him through. Who is he?"

Jot came forward, getting as close to Bijou as possible, and then moved off as he exclaimed:

"It's Bijou—the old Bijou."

"I thought so. Don't you see the kid knows ye? Now, tell me, will you, that you're not Bijou?"

William Swift laughed in the other's face, and the figure of the prisoner of the square straightened as he replied:

"The kid lies!" he cried. "The boy lies like a thief! Me Bijou? I'm Maxy Cappers."

"It's all d'e same," broke in Jot. "Meester Cappers operates on Wall Street and Bijou in d'e parks. You've got d'e right man, Mr. Swift. You've caught Bijou."

That moment the hand of William Swift relaxed a little, and the next instant his late prisoner was at the door.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FLIGHT AND HALT.

"Catch him, mister!"

Baxter Street Jot's face was white with alarm, but the figure of William Swift did not move.

The sudden escape seemed to have paralyzed him, but for a moment only.

But that lost moment was one of great value to the man already at the door, and the man from Spokane found himself looking into the muzzle of a leveled revolver when he went forward and stood face to face with his enemy.

Over the barrel came the cool, triumphant look of Bijou, for his nerves were steel and his heart as steady as his eager hands.

There was death in the eye.

"Another step and I'll paint the wall with your brains!" he said, addressing the Westerner. "It's a cool game you've played, but there's an end to all things. Stand where you are. This is a game for two, and I hold the trumps."

This was apparent.

Jot saw it and held his breath, and so did the man from Spokane.

Barely three feet separated the two men. The weapon covered William Swift's head, and he could look down the dark barrel and count his seconds of life.

Bijou put one hand behind him and touched the door-knob.

"Some other time!" said he, as he still regarded Broncho Bill. "You can't af-

ford to fool with me. But this you have learned already. You will be in the hands of the police of Gotham in an hour unless you make yourself scarce."

"Me?"

"You. You're William Swift, aren't you?"

"What if I am?"

"You seem to have forgotten the little affair in the Red Feather mine in which one Gordon Knight, Black Gordon, lost his life."

William Swift started.

"I see," grinned Bijou. "I see you remember the circumstance. I thought you would with a little reminder. Don't you know that the hand of justice can be laid on you as well in New York as in the West?"

There was no reply.

"You are in the shadow, and the quieter you keep the better it will be for your future. You see I'm not the ignorant bloke I look, and I know a little more about the old times in the mines than you give me credit for."

"But it was a fair duel," said William Swift.

"It was, eh? It was fair when you saw that Black Gordon got an empty weapon—when—"

A strange cry broke over Broncho Bill's lips.

"That may have been the code in the land of the Red Feather mine, but here they'd call it murder."

William Swift seemed to breathe hard.

"If he was living," said he. "If Iran Steele was not dead he could straighten out that tangle."

"He could, eh? But he may have left behind certain papers which detail the whole affair, and which stamp you as cold-blooded a murderer as ever went unhanged."

The half-lifted hand of the man from Spokane dropped at his side and Bijou, with a malicious grin on his face, opened the door.

"I'll see you later if you stay in the city," he said, as a parting shot. "Don't think that I'm as harmless as a dove, for I ain't, William Swift. And don't forget that the witness of the dead will place you in a trap compared to which all the traps you ever saw are nothing. I know you. I know all about the duel in the Red Feather, and I know, too, where to find the evidence."

The door was shut in the Westerner's face, and both he and Jot heard Bijou's steps beyond it.

For half a minute the figure of William Swift stood statue-like in the middle of the room.

Jot watched him narrowly, and saw all color leave his face, to come back suddenly as he seemed to think what had slipped through his fingers.

"Where is he?" cried the Westerner.

"What, did you let him get away, boy?"

"Was it my fault?"

"P'raps not."

William Swift ran to the door and tore it open, but the enemy was nowhere to be seen.

"It was a hard hit," said Jot, to himself. "The old Bijou had him foul and knew just how to strike. The blow went home. It was under d'e belt an'—"

Bill had come back.

"You will wait for Kent," he said, striding up to Jot. "You will stay here, boy?"

"If you say so, yes."

"Then I say so. You will hand him what I give you for that purpose."

Jot held out his hand.

"Whar' is it?" he asked.

Broncho Bill walked over to the table and sat down, his Atlantean shoulders rising like twin mountains above it.

He drew a piece of paper toward him, and with a pencil which he picked up, began to write.

It was not very fast work for the man from Spokane, for he was not an adept with the pen, but at last the message was completed, and he folded the paper.

Crowding it into an envelope which lay handy, he sealed it, and handed it to Baxter Street Jot.

"For Kent Keen when he comes," he said. "For no one else, boy. I'm off."

"Not to stay, Mr. Swift?"

"That paper tells, an' that's sufficient." Swift bowed to the astonished boy and crossed the room.

"Look out for d'e man—for Bijou," admonished Jot, but the next moment the man from Spokane was gone.

The boy sat down and waited.

It was to be a pretty long vigil, but he did not lose patience, and at last he heard some one at the door.

It opened to admit Kent Keen, and with a cry of joy Jot sprang forward to greet him.

"This is what he left," explained the boy spy.

Keen, tearing the envelope open, gave one glance at the contents of the message, and then whirled upon the watchful boy.

"Did he leave this of his own accord?" he asked.

"He wrote it after d'e interview with Bijou."

"With Bijou? Where?"

"Here. He caught him on the street an' fetched him to the room. But Bijou flashed a pistol an' d'en told in his ear some secret, an' William Swift wrote d'at message right away after Bijou had whispered to him."

The eyes of the detective wandered back to the paper in his hand and for a second he read the brief scrawl which ran as follows:

"Let the matter drop. I am off for ever. The devils have a hold on me which no power can break. I vanish from this moment and I go back to the land where they don't bag men and cheat them out of their rights. Good-by. You've been good to William Swift, but he don't deserve your sympathy. He isn't the sole keeper of the old secret of the Red Feather, but if Mohave Merle lived he would clear him of the red charge which Bijou has thrown into my teeth. Here I am friendless. In the West I can fight my way to riches. Let it go. I am not worthy to be called your friend. I shall never collect the note. Let the girl enjoy it. Let the dead keep his secrets. I am gone."

"WILLIAM SWIFT."

The Dead-Game Detective threw the letter upon the table, and then secured from Jot the full story of the charge which Bijou had hurled at William Swift.

"That doesn't alter the case one bit," said Keen. "I started out to find who killed Mohave Merle and to collect the fifty-thousand-dollar note. I will do both despite the letter lying yonder."

"I thought you would!" asserted Jot. "The man was all broke up, but he was in a fightin' humor."

"He shall win in the contest against the three conspirators. I will stand by William Swift to the end or I'm not worthy to be called the Dead-Game Detective!"

In another ten minutes the man of many trails stood in another part of the city and under the roof of Margaret Orth, in Midnight Alley.

Swift had been there—had come in silence and had departed almost in the same manner—had shaken hands with Ortiz and her mother, saying that he was going away from the city forever, and with no explanation he turned away and another moment saw him passing through the shadows of the Alley, to vanish in the street beyond tearfully watched by Ortiz, who had become greatly attached to the big-hearted Westerner.

Having heard this story the detective quietly withdrew.

So the charge of old crime had frightened off the man who had fought Indians and faced desperadoes of the far West at the revolver's muzzle. He had been scared away, and in a short time would be across the river.

Knowing that he had no time to lose, Kent Keen quickened his steps toward the river and was approaching the Cortlandt Street Ferry when there rang out on the night air a cry of alarm, and he saw coming toward the ferry a carriage drawn by two runaway bays.

And straight toward the ferry-house as an arrow rushed the team.

No driver was seen, and the lines dangling alongside the carriage told that the Jehu had lost his seat earlier in the exciting drama.

A man ran from the sidewalk, and with more foolhardiness than courage tried to check the horses, but was thrown from the street against the curb.

In another instant the mad steeds would dash into the ferry-house itself, and there would be a crash and death.

At this juncture there sprang from the shadow of the ferry a stalwart figure.

Everybody saw him, and from the detective's lips came the cry:

"William Swift! The man from Spokane!"

Conscious of his powers, the man from the West awaited the onset, and suddenly leaping clear of the stones, he seemed to throw himself against one of the runaways.

In another instant man and horses were down on the stones in a struggling heap, but instantly the whole scene changed; the team had been thrown, and the mad horses had found their master.

The crowd closed in now and a policeman took possession of the ground where he had refused to pit his strength against the runaways.

Some one looked into the carriage and discovered a young girl in a faint among the cushions.

They disengaged the horses and the man in the street and looked into the bronzed face of the brave rescuer, as his figure was lifted up.

"He's dead!" said one.

"Dead? Not he! Such men conquer death," replied Kent Keen, as he pressed forward.

The face of William Swift was getting deathly white.

Keen put his hand on his shoulder and bent over him, saying, in a clear voice:

"You know me, William? Kent Keen!"

The eyes became fastened upon the Crook-Crusher of Gotham.

"Kent! Hold me! Don't let me play coward. I'll never run from a lie ag'in. Black Gordon killed himself. I'll prove it."

The two men clasped hands; the Dead-Game Detective believed Broncho Bill.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

Bijou, or Meester Capper, old Josy's patron, knew, when he was taken into the detective's room by Broncho Bill, that the attempt on the ferret's life had failed.

When he freed himself from his captor by the striking play we have witnessed, he went down the street in a disturbed frame of mind.

He felt that he had freed himself from the man from Spokane, but there was the indefatigable ferret of the metropolis.

A keen villain is always armed, and it was thus with Bijou.

Had he loitered about the scene of the last adventure he would have seen William Swift come forth for the flight which ended so startlingly at the ferry-house, but he did not tarry.

Instead of this, he went home and shut himself up in his parlor.

As the head investor of the firm of Sellers & Cahner, he had had some rare opportunities to make money, and had availed himself of them.

But, on the other hand, he was a natural rogue, and it had not been hard for Roland Rash to draw him into the game we have followed in some of its dark and thrilling meanderings.

It was late when Bijou got home.

He had just taken a fragrant cigar from the open box on the table, when he heard a latch-key snap in the lock, and in another moment, Chocolate appeared.

The pair greeted one another, and the man with the dark face came forward and dropped into a chair opposite Bijou.

"The captain says he has won," was Chocolate's announcement. "He has caught me a wife."

Bijou laughed as he returned:

"She's pretty, Chocolate, but you'll have

a time with her, for she's cunning and cool."

"I've seen her at her best. You remember how she faced me the time I dropped into the house and saw Iran Steele die."

"Yes, and it took all your nerve, Chocolate, to withstand her."

"I know that; but once married, I can handle her with more ease. She is yet to know me, Bijou."

"Perhaps," commented Bijou, as he puffed away. "I wish you well, Chocolate. So the captain has made the bargain?"

"He has just told me so."

"When is it to occur?"

Chocolate shook his head. He could not say.

"I trust Roland has succeeded; but as long as that Dead-Game Detective is able to work Myrtle, she won't become Mrs. Chocolate."

A change had come over the spirit of Chocolate's dreams.

The man, who some time before did not think of marriage, was now eager to wed Myrtle Steele, and to get his hands on the thousands left behind by the millionaire.

He was inclined to take Bijou's remarks as bordering on insolence, and his face lost color as he leaned forward and said:

"You must have your eyes on the girl yourself. You are trying to discourage me."

"Not at all. Remember that there's many a slip, and so forth, Chocolate. Kent Keen still lives; don't overlook that fact."

"I thought he had been settled."

"So did I; but he is ready to reach out and catch the fox—if he can!"

Chocolate looked troubled.

"Then, there's Jimsy Curt, but he don't bother me much," he averred. "I'm not afraid of the girl Ortiz, either, and as for the Westerner—why, he won't be a match for us both. Eh, Bijou?"

"Not as much trouble as this smoke," and the speaker parted a cloud of smoke with his hand. "I can go down into Wall Street to-morrow, fearing nothing, so far as I'm concerned, as he don't know that I'm Maxy Capper. He knows me solely as Bijou, a man without any particular occupation, and Wall Street is the last place he would ever look for me."

"That's right. But, confound it all! he is liable to look for me where I'm likely to be found. My face is against me."

Bijou looked at the dark features across the table and smiled faintly.

"That's a fact, Chocolate. Nature hasn't been as kind to you as to me. But once Myrtle's husband, you're in clover. You can defy or buy, for then you'll have money enough."

"I'll buy, most likely; but it won't be blackmail very long," said Chocolate. "I say, Bijou, what will I have to give the captain?"

Instantly Bijou frowned.

"He'll fix that, I guess, and you may depend upon it's being a good round sum."

"I know the man."

"As a matchmaker he will have to have something."

"Of course. Will twenty thousand do it?"

Bijou looked over the tip of his cigar into Chocolate's face, and let out a long whistle.

"You may add a hundred thousand to it," he said.

"I won't pay it!"

"Come, don't cross the river till you've reached the bank, my boy," laughed Bijou. "It's devilish poor policy. In the first place, you're not yet married, Chocolate, and, secondly, you haven't even spoken to the bride-elect."

Chocolate bit his lips in chagrin.

"That's right. I won't pay him until I corral the stakes."

"That's it exactly, and not until you've consulted me."

"I won't, Bijou. I've found you true in everything, and we'll work together, eh?"

"We will."

"Now, if Kent Keen was only out of the way, I'd be happy. I always fear that hand of his."

"We can render that hand useless. In the first place, he has lost his friend, Will-

iam Swift," and Bijou proceeded and gave a detailed account of his late adventure with the man from Spokane.

"Whew! That was a play, wasn't it?" cried Chocolate, in his ardor, reaching across the table and seizing Bijou's hand. "That was what I call a grand coup. And no one else in the world could have played it but yourself, Bijou."

"Perhaps not. I had the cards, you see."

"Of course. Did the papers you had in the niche in the wall give you the clew?"

A slight bow on Bijou's part was the answer.

"Why, they're worth their weight in gold! But they were stolen, I remember. You got them back. Eh?"

"Didn't I? I would like to see a thief long beat Maxy Capper. It just can't be done, Chocolate."

"Of course not. William Swift is gone by this time. That man will go back to the mines pursued by the shadow of the keen Bijou, and we will reap the fifty thousand."

For a little while the crafty Bijou was silent; then he opened a drawer in the table and pulled out a long, black pocket-book.

"The weapons are here," he said, significantly touching the book. "I've got them all right to my hand and the harvest is ready for the reaping."

"That's boss!" cried Chocolate. "I will win her in spite of the wily detective."

"Listen, Chocolate! He is a more wary bird than the one we bagged in the Park. This Kent Keen is the keenest man of the trail in New York. I don't want to disguise matters at all. We must strike a blow that kills, otherwise we are not safe."

The dark face of Chocolate changed color, and for a moment looked quite white.

"How? Name the plan, Bijou."

"He is the man who holds in his hands our fortunes and our very lives."

"I've realized that."

"With him in the way there can be no wedding. Myrtle cannot become your wife!"

"Then the man dies!"

Bijou did not look away, but kept his eyes riveted upon his friend's face.

"Kent Keen," he went on, dropping his voice to a confidential whisper, "is on the trail, which, if followed to the end, will interfere with another's happiness besides yours. Do you know what Roland wants to do, Chocolate?" he sharply asked.

Chocolate, all attention, shook his head.

"He will be a benedict himself in a short time."

"Our Roland?" cried Chocolate, falling back.

"Exactly. On the sly, as it were; he has carried on a courtship right under our very noses, and we haven't seen it."

"I never dreamed of such a thing, Bijou."

"But it's true. He is even now engaged to a young girl who will become his wife. Roland is sleek, and he naturally wants all the clews lost."

"So do I; but Roland, as the head of the little scheme, and on the eve of marriage, would want them buried forever, and the detective out of the world."

"Yes. There's one clew not yet found."

"What's that?"

A slight noise at the window seemed to attract Bijou's attention, and he slipped across the carpet without replying.

"Did you hear anything?" asked Chocolate. "It was the wind. It has raised since nightfall. What is that clew, Bijou?"

"I refer to the note."

"Why, he burnt that."

The face of Bijou assumed a strange expression.

"Do you think so?" he asked.

"Don't you know we saw him do it?"

"He did hold the paper over the blaze and then throw the whole lot, ashes, fragments, and all, into the grate."

"He did that very thing."

"Well, it wasn't destroyed. Some one came and found the bits."

"Kent Keen?"

"I won't say who did it, but I believe they found their way into his hands."

"That's bad. We must strike—this time once for all. There must be no need of another blow, Bijou."

"Now you talk sense," and the smooth-faced man's eyes betrayed his approval. "I will go back to the desk to-morrow. I will again be Maxy Capper, head investor for Sellers & Cahner, for we have a big deal on our hands for that day. After that I am Bijou till the end of the play."

"That's good. Till the end of the play! We'll end it at once."

"I think we will have to, to win."

"What will Roland do?" asked Chocolate.

"We can depend on him, for he realizes the situation. Let William Swift go. It is Kent Keen who is in our way. After him it is clear sailing. The note must be forever lost."

"Or my future wife will pay it, and I can't afford to lose that sum," grinned Chocolate.

Bijou tossed his cigar into the spittoon and rose.

He threw a look across the room, and for a moment looked dreamily at the wall before him.

"I had a dream last night," said he, suddenly dropping his eyes to Chocolate. "It was a dream that awoke me, and I felt the chill of the bracelets on my wrists. But," laughing, "dreams go by contraries, so instead of bracelets it will be fortune."

"I trust so," and Chocolate tried to follow Bijou's laugh, but failed. "I never dream, thank Heaven!"

"You're blessed, then. But now, for the last play! Meet me to-morrow night here. Keep dark. Just because you're a prospective bridegroom you're not supposed to air yourself on Broadway. After to-morrow Maxy Capper vanishes, and Bijou takes the boards for good."

Chocolate looked admiringly at his companion in villainy, and then picked up a cigar.

He had implicit faith in Bijou.

He had seen him tried before, and he knew his man; but—

He was soon to see his house of cards fall.

Poor Chocolate!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CHOCOLATE AND JIMSY.

The rescue of the girl in the carriage by William Swift had nearly put an end to Broncho Bill.

At any rate, it had put a stop to his flight from Bijou's threats, and when he recovered sufficiently to walk off with his friend Keen his face had lost some of its hunted look.

In the detective's room Kent Keen stood face to face with the man from Spokane and heard from his lips the story of the kidnapping and of his subsequent adventures in the dungeon from which his tremendous strength had extricated him.

"The accusation came upon me like a thunderbolt," avowed Broncho Bill. "It overwhelmed me, and I penned the letter which I left with the boy, Jot, for you. Black Gordon and I did go down into the depths of the Red Feather to fight, and Mohave Merle was to be the sole witness."

"There had been an old feud between us for years, and we had to have it out some time. Black Gordon loaded his revolver in our presence, and he did not possess the empty weapon which Bijou spoke about. I waited for the command to fire, which was to come from Mohave's lips, when, all at once, there was a deafening report, and Black Gordon tumbled headlong in the passage."

"He had shot himself with his own weapon, and we stood over his dead body far under ground. But when Bijou startled me with the charge that we had put up a game on the man, and that I had killed him unfairly, it drove all courage from me, for here I am a stranger in a strange land—a man hunted by three of the keenest rogues that ever breathed the air of heaven, and all because I stood between them and a heap of money."

"But that was not the worst of it. That man intimated that he had papers which would fasten the charge against me. Mohave Merle, he said, had left a confession

behind, and I saw the terrible toils in which I stood. What if he, in a moment of revenge against me, had penned a falsehood, and what if it had fallen into their hands? I could not disprove it. There it was—the confession of the dead. Lips sealed forever! The story of Black Gordon's death we kept to ourselves, and I stood blameless in the sight of Heaven, for I would have fought him fairly and at his own suggestion. But you see how black Bijou made it. You see the terrible accusation, and how I was not able to disprove it, if he had it in black and white from Mohave Merle's hand?

"It nearly drove me mad. I saw rise before me another prison and the grip of your police. I resolved to go back—to give up my claims to a portion of Mohave's wealth, and to fight my way to riches in the far West. That is why I fled, with the haunting terror behind me. In another half hour I would have been out of your reach, Kent. In a short time William Swift would have been out of the game."

Such was the strongly emphasized story to which the detective listened.

"It is no flight now," he said to the man from Spokane.

"It is fight," was the resolute response. "It is the breaking of the grip of three dangerous villains. I'll battle for my rights. If the note is destroyed—"

The New York detective waved his hand, crossed the room, and opened a little door set in the wall.

In a moment he came back with a long pocketbook in his hand and opened it as he sat down.

He took from it a piece of paper upon which other bits had been deftly pasted.

William Swift gave vent to a cry.

"It is the note! It is the fifty-thousand note come to light!"

The detective looked up triumphant.

"But it has passed through the fire."

"It has. All the pieces are not here, you see, but enough are present to make it good."

"There's the signature—Mohave Merle."

"And your name. That makes it all right."

"Did you snatch it from the fire?" asked the Westerner.

"No; another found it. Morgan went to the place where it lay in pieces and carried it off."

"Who is Morgan?"

"A man whom Roland Rash once wronged, and who is on the trail of vengeance."

"But he must not baffle us," urged the man from Spokane.

"No living man shall do that," was the reply, and the other smiled.

Soon after this interview the Westerner made his way to Midnight Alley, and once more stood in Ortiz's home.

The detective had gone elsewhere.

In another part of the city a man appeared to be waiting for some one to emerge from a house on a quiet street, and waited not long, for in a half hour's time, out of the doorway came another man, who leisurely passed on down the street toward the river.

In an instant the person on the watch threw himself upon this one's track and followed him until he landed him in a well-to-do house near the river.

"Now," said the spy, "I have Roland Rash tracked for the night. I can find him for Dead-Game Keen."

Jimsey Curt, pleased with his work, departed, but before long reappeared in front of the same house.

He settled down for a long espionage, for he took possession of a doorway opposite, and fell to watching the house with eagle eyes.

The watched door did not open again for some time, but it did so, at length, and Jimsey started off after the person who came forth. "It's d'e game I'm to keep in sight till Kent throws out his hand for the last grab."

So eager was he to keep the man in sight that he quickened his gait, and in a short time was close at his heels.

Suddenly the shadowed man turned upon his shadower.

Jimsey uttered an exclamation of surprise

and fell back, as, with hat pulled over his brows, the man came toward Jimsey.

Their eyes met.

It was not Roland.

It was Chocolate—Chocolate with the dark face, and now with the tigerish mien.

For a moment Jimsey thought of the chair and the dungeon, and then that the hands of this man had helped to consign him to both.

It was a moment of suspense for the detective's spy.

Only a moment, for Chocolate sprang at Jimsey with the agility of a wild beast, but the agile Jimsey threw out his arms, and then commenced a struggle for life along the wall of the adjoining building.

The street for some distance was deserted.

The sounds they made were the only ones that broke the silence of the hour in that quarter.

Not a word was spoken by the men.

The death struggle, if such it was to be, was in silence.

Back and forth they swayed; back and forth, until, at length, Jimsey was forced to the pavement, and they had it on the stones.

The battle was against Jimsey now, for the other's grip was on his throat.

Jimsey gasped for breath, and almost gave up, but at this juncture there came a man down the sidewalk on a run.

Some one had discovered the battle on the stones, and was coming to the rescue—but to whose?

"He can find you, but dead!" hissed Chocolate, and Jimsey saw by the flash in the light that the desperate villain had drawn a knife and lifted it for a final stroke.

The running person came up, looked at the two men, and hurriedly ran off again.

A strange proceeding, truly. Had the knife's gleam frightened him away?

The stroke was warded off by Jimsey as the hand came down, and he threw Chocolate over with a burst of strength.

The next moment he was on his feet again, but Chocolate was up too!

They stood face to face like gladiators catching breath.

Only for a second thus; then brave Jimsey took the initiative.

He went for the foe with all his power.

He beat down the arm which Chocolate threw up, and bore him toward the gutter.

They were not in locked arms now.

Jimsey caught at Chocolate's throat, but the villain tore loose, and the next instant was free—was off on a run.

Jimsey was not as swift as a gazelle; indeed, he had never trained for a sprinter, and knew he could not overtake the nimble Chocolate.

Jimsey stooped and picked up a stone from the gutter debris.

Chocolate was still within easy distance and the spy launched the missile at him with terrific vim.

There followed a half-stifled cry, then the fleeing man threw up his hands and dropped in the middle of the street.

For a half second Jimsey stood spell-bound over his victory.

"It's better him than me," concluded Jimsey, going forward at last, to find Chocolate, insensible and beeding.

"Here, sir! Don't rob your victim, please," was called out, and Jimsey Curt looked up into the face of a patrol.

The detective's spy sprang to his feet, but the hand of the policeman had closed on his arm.

"It's too plain. Don't deny it," said the officer. "I saw the man fall. It looks like murder."

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHEN THE HUNTED TIGER TURNS.

The Dead-Game Detective was closing in on the three bad men of the plot.

After leaving William Swift he made his way to the little shop kept by old Josy, the lapidary and pawnbroker, and was readily admitted.

Meester Capper had come for his ring, and the old man had to confess that he could not replace the stone lost somewhere, but really in the Park, where Jimsey had found it.

"Do you know what Mr. Capper's occupation is?" asked the detective.

The old man grinned. He made it a business to find out all he could about his patrons, and so had hunted up Bijou's record.

"I know him," he assured. "He is a rich man on Wall Street."

"A nice man, too, eh, Josy?"

"Not so nice all the time."

"You've been investigating, then?"

"A leetle, Meester Keen."

"All the time on Wall Street?"

Josy shook his head.

"No, Meester Capper is not all d'e time on Wall Street; he gets off the Street now and then and makes some monish with the pasteboards."

"Yes?"

"He is a good player, and fortune smiles on him."

"When she doesn't frown, eh?"

Josy nodded.

Kent left the little shop and was once more on the street. Jot had told him where he would be apt to find Bijou when he was not fighting the tiger or serving Roland, and thither he bent his steps.

Perhaps if he could have heard what passed between Chocolate and Bijou, a talk in which his name was frequently mentioned, he might have changed his tactics, but not having had this interview reported to him, he kept on.

It was nearly an hour later when the Dead-Game Detective rang the bell at the door of Bijou's home—hoping that Bijou himself would answer the ring.

Soon the door opened, the detective stepped inside, and was confronted by Bijou, dressed in a smoking jacket, and seemingly just interrupted in the evening "lay-off."

He knew his caller only too well, but was not disconcerted, apparently, in the least.

"You know me," remarked the detective. "Let's us adjourn to the parlor, where we can talk."

For a moment Bijou did not stir, as he spoke:

"You're cool in coming here at this hour. I know you. What do you want?"

"We'll come to that a little later on, Mr. Capper."

Bijou led the way, watched like a hawk by his visitor, and as he ushered him into a luxuriously-furnished room, the host turned upon his guest with the coolness of a nerry rogue.

"Don't you think you've come to the wrong house?" he asked, with consummate impudence.

"Not at all. You are Maxy Capper?"

A smile for a moment played with Bijou's mouth and then vanished.

"I may be Mr. Capper, and I may not. But you seem to know me."

"I have seen you at work in Wall Street."

"You may be right. But what is your business with me?"

"I want the papers."

Bijou, who had leaned against the edge of the table, looked at the detective with imperturbable coolness.

"The papers?" he echoed.

"Yes, you have them. You played the role of Roger Takem, detective, and brought them away from Iran Steele's house."

"Prove it."

"Come," warned Kent. "Don't provoke me, Bijou. You took the papers; you rendered Miss Myrtle insensible, and then lost your seal ring in the pocket of her dress."

For the first time Bijou started.

They had found his ring.

"You did not look for it in her dress, if you looked at all," continued the detective. "It was deftly hidden there, and when you were gone she found it. Do you want any further proof of your visit to the house, and of your complicity in the crime there committed?"

"In your eyes that's enough."

"Exactly. It is all the proof I want. But the papers? You have them."

The gaze of Bijou wandered across the room and for a moment rested on a certain picture on the wall.

"You are unfortunate with your rings," suggested the caller.

"Why so?" in some surprise.

"You lost a set from another."

"I? What do you mean?"

"You! It was in the Park, a few nights ago. You haven't forgotten, Bijou. It was while you were bagging the man from Spokane. The lost set old Josy failed to replace, and you had to get another ring after taking the first one back."

A little stare of wonder came to Bijou's eyes, and he looked at Kent Keen without speaking, for a moment.

"We have the set lost in the Park. You lost it in the little struggle with William Swift. You didn't think to look there for it, for it did not occur to you that it might be found on the scene of the 'sacking.'"

"Let me see it," and the man reached out, but nothing dropped into his hand.

"Not now," reminded the wary detective. "Am I going to get the papers?"

"Not as easily as you got the set from the ring, according to your story," smiled the dodger.

They stood face to face, the detective and the rogue, and looked at one another scrutinizingly.

They were alone in the room, and perhaps were the sole occupants of the house.

"The last attempt failed," intimated Kent, suggestively.

"What attempt?"

"The one in my office."

"I see it did."

Could any one be cooler than the one before the man-hunter of New York?

Bijou had folded his arms and was looking into the detective's searching eyes.

"So," said he, "you want the papers? Well, Mr. Keen, you shall have them on one condition."

"Name it."

"Immunity from arrest."

The cornered rascal was ready to make terms.

"Shall it be so? Remember, you have Chocolate and Roland. They must satisfy you. I must have my freedom."

Keen thought rapidly. Roland was the chief plotter, but this man—the cool and sleek Bijou—he was his master's equal, perhaps superior, in deception and deviltry.

But the tireless Crook-Crusher now had all the links of the chain of guilt in his hand, for he knew that Roland and Bijou had invaded Iran Steele's mansion, and that the body of the dead man told that their assault had killed him.

He had never had compromised with an assassin, and he would not with this one—villain of sublime assurance that he was.

"I make no bargain with you beforehand," he replied; "I must have the documents you carried from Iran Steele's house without conditions."

Bijou moved toward the little landscape on the wall, but halfway between the table and the wall he stopped and turned upon the detective.

"I must have my freedom. I will show you where the papers are. They were stolen from me once, and but for me you would not have them so near you now."

"No doubt of that. Let me see them."

"My freedom."

"We'll talk about that afterward; no conditions now, I repeat."

Once more Bijou turned toward the wall, but his face had changed color.

It was strangely white and his lips seemed bloodless, as he jerked the picture aside, opened the secret compartment in the wall, and took out a package of documents tied with a red string.

With these in his hand he turned upon the detective.

"They are worth their weight in gold to the girl," said he. "I hold in my hands the papers which would make her life miserable."

"Hand them here!"

"The bargain first. Only my liberty will buy them!"

He spoke with grim resolution, and he held the package in a tantalizing manner in front of the man of many trails.

"Shall I have it?" he demanded.

"I cannot compromise with crime."

"You can't, eh? You can't let me walk

out of this house and give me an hour's start?"

"I cannot," decisively.

"It is that or nothing! I will burn the papers before your eyes," and the rogue took a match from his pocket and struck it on the wall. Then he held the blaze close to the papers.

Keen watched the blaze as it scorched the packet.

"You can't win by such a dodge or threat," he said.

"You can't play out your hand without Bijou," was the response.

Keen, well understanding the villain's temper, measured the distance between them, but the quick-witted scoundrel anticipated him.

Holding the match against the documents, they blazed at once.

He held them in front of him.

"Take them," he cried. "You have come for them, Kent Keen, but you shall have ashes instead of Iran Steele's confession and the history of his past."

The detective threw up his hands.

"They are yours, I say," Bijou cried. "These are the papers which I carried from the mansion. Why conceal the incident now? You can't reap all the harvest. You can't, without the help of Bijou. Kent Keen, you are really at the end of your tether. You are a cool-headed ferret, but you stand helpless at the end of this trail. To-night there will be no William Swift to claim his reward; to-morrow the city will awake to the fact that it harbors men shrewder than its detectives. It will learn that Bijou is the boss schemer of the island. And you, Keen, with all your cleverness at unraveling plots—you, I say, will be out of the game—clean out of it, I say!"

And the speaker threw the blazing papers into the detective's face, and, as Keen threw up his hand to ward off the novel weapon, the whole room seemed to ring with the deafening report of a revolver.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TIGHTENING COILS.

A few squares away a man paced a well-carpeted floor with impatient strides. He was surrounded by evidences of wealth, for the appointments of the high-ceilinged room were magnificent.

More than once he consulted a watch and then glanced at the door.

"It is past time, and they were to be here without fail," he said, aloud. "They never failed before. I will wait another ten minutes, and then I will see what's up."

He waited, but with the same impatience.

The cigar he lit he puffed at a little while, and then threw it into the spittoon.

"I'll see. The night must not pass without the great play of the game. This detective, who is the sole stumbling block in our way, must feel our teeth. After that it will be plain sailing, and with all three of us to look after him he will not find the golden egg in the nest he seeks."

Roland, the handsome, cool-headed Roland, looked once more at his watch; then he left the room, and presently was hurrying away.

Bijou and Chocolate had failed to keep an appointment, and he was at a loss to know what had detained them.

"Roland," called a voice near him, when he had reached a point about a square from the house.

Roland turned and saw a man near him. For out of the darkness had stepped Morgan.

Roland eyed the man with the vision of a startled hawk.

"What is it?" he demanded sharply.

"We're not the best of friends. You know that, but I can't help warning you," was the answer. "You're in great danger."

"I don't want your advice or information."

Roland's voice was harsh and repellent, and his hands shut while he spoke.

"I can't go entirely back on you. They're closing in on all of you," Morgan again gave warning.

Roland waved his hand deprecatingly and started on.

"I don't ask a dollar for this advice. I don't want a penny for my warning," continued Morgan, following him. "You haven't done right by me, but I can't see you caught by this keen man-catcher."

"Leave that to us," commanded the chief of the vile cohort. "This keen man-catcher may have no fish in his net when he pulls it in."

"Let me tell you, Roland—"

"Well, tell, but be quick about it."

"He's got the pieces of the note."

"What of it?"

"He's got more. He holds in his hands the clues to the crime. This man is armed as never detective was armed in this city."

"We can render all his weapons harmless."

"I don't see how," persisted Morgan.

"I don't have to stop here and explain," snapped Roland.

"You won't accept the warning, then?"

"I don't want it, coming from you. You've proved treacherous once before, and may be so again. I don't trust you at all."

Morgan, thus accused, dropped his eyes.

"You threatened to betray us all to the police. You may have done that already."

"I have not."

"But treason was in your heart. Stand off and wait. See me break the hold of this human hound. They say he never fails. They will tell you that he is a match for the shrewdest men in the world, but for us—pish! Morgan, he isn't a circumstance!"

Roland ran one hand into his pocket as he spoke.

When it came forth it held several pieces of gold.

"Not a penny, I said," replied Morgan, with a show of indignation. "I wouldn't touch your money, Roland."

Roland coolly returned the coins to his pocket and started off again.

"You don't know how soon he may close in on you," still urged the other.

"I'll risk all that."

"Then go; but remember, the man who hates you yet remembers a past, so he warned you in time."

"I'll not forget you!"

Morgan looked after the vanishing figure and then muttered something which no one heard but himself.

As for Roland, he hastened on his way.

"To think that that Judas should warn me," he said, in undertones. "It was a trap, more like. It was a scheme of the traitor, and one by which he expected to serve the Dead-Game Detective. A warning from Morgan certainly would not come to me. He would sooner see the bars shut me from the world than help me escape," and he quickened his steps as he mused.

Once he paused to watch an ambulance go by.

He saw the misty figures on the inside and noticed that a human body was being taken to the hospital.

Little did he think that he was watching the last ride of one of his companions—little guessed that he had just seen the ambulance which carried Chocolate, Jimmy's victim, to the death-ward.

As the vehicle whisked round the nearest corner he moved on again, and at last ran up the steps of Bijou's house.

He rang the bell, and waited one minute—two minutes, for a reply, but none came.

"Not at home, either? What's happened? Has Morgan warned them, and did they cowardly listen to the traitor?"

Roland turned the knob, and the front door yielded.

Beyond it there was a singular silence, and he stopped in the hall lit up by the chandelier.

To the right lay the parlor, and he went thither.

Roland tried the door of this room, and it yielded.

But the place was vacant.

A smell of burned powder was on the air, and he stood for a little while in the semi-darkness.

But he stepped forward and turned up the gas, flooding the room with light, and seeing everything, as it were, at a glance.

Nothing seemed to have been disturbed. "Not here," said Roland, pausing at the table, but the next instant he lost color.

Something dark and glistening-like stained the light tablecloth under his hand.

It gave his hand a reddish spot when he touched it, and he bent forward and looked.

"By Jove, it's blood!" he cried, straightening up in dismay.

He gazed around the room again, and once more sniffed the powder-laden atmosphere.

Suddenly a door was heard to shut.

He had heard some one, he was not the sole tenant of the house.

Some one came down the stairs, and he could have sprung out and faced him, but he waited.

Nearer and nearer came the unseen.

Roland, now at the door, revolver in hand, waited.

The knob turned.

Up came the six-shooter, and the head of the conspiracy was on guard with bated breath.

In another moment the door opened, and the alert Roland caught the arm which came into the room slightly in advance of a diminutive body.

There was a cry, and Roland's face became on the instant alight with a smile of triumph.

He had caught the intruder, but what an odd one he was!

"Here, you little rascal! Who sent you here?"

Baxter Street Jot, looked up with the whitest of faces, but made no answer.

"Speak," and the revolver crept close to the boy's temple. "Tell the truth, boy."

"I wasn't sent," asserted Jot.

"Eh? You don't mean to tell me that you came on your own account?"

"Don't I, though?"

"What brought you hither?"

Jot made no reply.

He was dragged across the carpet and dumped into the armchair.

Roland's finger pointed to the blood-stain on the table.

"Whose blood is that, boy?"

Jot shook his head.

"No lies!"

"I never lie."

"How long have you been here?" demanded the man.

"Thirty minutes."

"What brought you to the house?"

"I came to see Bijou."

"You—to see Bijou? Well, did you see him?"

Jot nodded.

"You did, eh? What became of him?"

"He went off."

"Alone?"

"Why not? Who would he go off with, think you?"

"You're cute, boy, but I want nothing but the truth," was the reply.

"D'at's jes' w'ot you're gittin'."

Roland took a long breath.

"That was no fair answer," he said, looking down at the boy-spy. "Bijou, as you call him, is in trouble."

Jot shut his lips hard and merely looked up into the cold, handsome face of Roland Rash.

"One second," cried the man. "Whose blood is that yonder? You must know?"

Jot's eyes slowly turned to the stain, and he ventured to touch it.

"Why, it's wet yet," he exclaimed.

"Of course," snapped Roland, "and you know whose gore it is. I want to know, too."

The boy slid from the chair and stood before the man, whose face betrayed a singular admixture of fear and excitement.

"It's too late, Roland!" said he. "It's too late, I say."

"What's that? Too late for what?"

"For the escape. The coils have tightened. Kent Keen is at the end o' his trail."

"Kent Keen?"

"Jes' so. Bijou's bagged!"

"When did it happen?"

"To-night, an' in d'is house. It's too late, Roland."

The man fell back in real alarm, while the Baxter Street special continued:

"He's got everything in his fist, has Keen. Roland, you might as well walk round to Mulberry Street and s'render."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE END OF THE TRIO.

Let us go back and resume the adventure which we were witnessing in the same room with Kent Keen, the Crook-Crusher, and Bijou, the clever villain.

The sound of the pistol shot filled the chamber, and the detective reeled from it, but recovered in a moment, and suddenly Bijou saw leaping at him, through the smoke, the lithe man of many trails.

The two men came together, and the struggle for the mastery began.

Bijou was forced over the sharp edge of the table, and a drop of blood from Kent's flesh wound fell upon the cloth, in after moments to mystify Roland.

But the Wall Street player had his match this time, and he was shown in a startling manner that the Dead-Game Detective was indeed a matchless enemy, for the cunning crook was thrown from the table into the chair, and the sudden snapping of handcuffs completed the victory.

The half-burned packet still lay on the floor, and Keen, at once picking it up, proceeded, in a business-like way, to open it at the table.

"Was that what you wanted?" he asked, looking up at his captor.

"Yes, just what I wanted," was the reply. "It was with this that you frightened William Swift. You knew the weapon you held, and you played it for all it was worth. You own up to that?"

"Why not?" grinned Bijou.

"You found these papers on the desk the time you went to Iran Steele's house and rendered Myrtle unconscious. You own up to that?"

"No use to deny anything now, since you are dead-game on the whole business. Yes, I found the papers, as you say. I realized their great importance. They are old, but what of that? They were written long before the note for fifty thousand dollars was given to Desert Dan for William Swift, when Mohave Merle wanted to blacken his old partner's character. I saw through all this at once, I say. And the other paper? It is false, of course."

"Certainly, but it was the weapon which Roland held over Myrtle's head to force her into a marriage with Chocolate," asserted the detective. "She is not the child of a criminal couple. Other documents prove that these are infamously false."

"Where are those documents?"

"They were found this morning in the house—in Iran Steele's private chamber. So, Bijou, the whole villainous game is up."

There was no reply for a little while, and the face of Bijou, or Maxy Capper, grew white.

"What was the full purpose of the scheme, anyhow?" asked the detective.

"Let that remain a secret."

"You wanted to get hold of Iran Steele's wealth, and you saw that the only sure way to do this was first to kill him, and then crush the girl by a base marriage."

Not a muscle of Bijou's face moved.

"You and Roland did the job," continued the detective. "But, in the first place, having heard of the note, and perhaps finding out that William Steele was on the road to collect it, you—"

"We did know that," put in Bijou, with a smile. "We got wind of that by his stopping over in Omaha and getting into a little trouble there. We watched the ferries, but your spy, Jimsy, got hold of him first, and we had to change our plans a little."

"After that you bagged him by a ruse and nearly killed the Western Samson in the dungeon of the nest."

"It was a close call for Broncho Bill, that you must admit."

Kent looked at the cool prisoner, and for a moment did not speak.

"They'll miss you in Wall Street, Bijou," said he, at last.

"It's all right. Life's full of risks, anyhow," and he waved his hand nonchalant-

ly. "I'm Maxy Capper there, but Sellers & Cahner can find another head investor. The city's full of good men—like me," and he ended with a sardonic laugh.

Not long afterward a man who looked sleek and clean, and who wore a haughty air, stepped from a closed carriage and walked into police headquarters beside Kent Keen, the Crook-Crusher.

On the blotter opposite the serious charge registered against him was written the name of "Maxy Capper," and as he turned away, he was heard to say:

"I'm going to have company before morning, for this fisher for sharks is pulling in his net."

Kent Keen went to another house that night, but did not find his man in.

Roland's handsome parlor was empty, and the Dead-Game Detective stood for a little while amid the luxuriousness there and looked around.

Where was Roland?

He was asking himself this question when he heard the latch-key turn softly in the outside lock.

Kent stepped behind a heavy silk curtain.

He heard the door open and footsteps cross the room. Then he looked out to behold a man standing at the table, with his back turned toward him.

It was Roland Rash.

The detective could not see his face, but he could hear his labored breathing as he stood alone by the table.

"They've got Bijou. Kent Keen has pulled in the net and the game-fish is in it," Roland spoke, in audible tones. "I'm left to fight him with Chocolate. Shall I fight? Bijou will keep a silent tongue if we fight it out. He won't betray us."

"He has betrayed you, Roland."

The man at the table turned as if struck from behind by an arrow, to see the curtains part and the dread Crook-Crusher stood before him.

"I thought so," was all that fell from Roland's lips. "I might have suspected that you were here from what the boy told me."

His figure seemed to straighten in the light, and he drew back a step, but the revolver of the detective looked him fairly in the face.

"What's the use? The trumps are in your hands," he was heard to hiss. "Kent Keen, we might have finished you early in the game, but I never thought you could stand where you are and face me—in my own house."

"I would have found you in time, anyhow, Roland. I have all the threads. I have the whole skein untangled."

"Then," said Roland, as he held out his hands, showing the marble wrists of gentility, "then take the enemy no man has ever conquered before this hour."

In time there came from the hospital, snatched from the shadow of death, the wasted figure of Chocolate, and Jimsy Curt, who had not been held long by the police, stood beside the detective once more in the little office.

The law was justly severe with the conspirators; its ungloved hand smote them as they deserved, and the only one to come out of the shadow of the halter was Chocolate, who entered a mad-house to live in mental eclipse the remainder of his days from the effects of the missile hurled at him by Jimsy.

William Swift, the man from Spokane, got more than his fifty thousand, for Myrtle insisted on trying to make him forget his imprisonment by a large donation, and she persisted in giving the happy Ortiz a neat sum when she became Broncho Bill's adored and adoring life-pard, as he fondly termed her.

As for Myrtle, she afterward found happiness in the love of a good husband and lovely children, but she never forgot the tragedy of the mansion nor the three crooks of Gotham.

Jimsy Curt is still best man to the Dead-Game Detective, while the Baxter Street Special is ever at the call of Kent Keen, his worthy Grand Master.

And, as Grand Master in the craft, the Dead-Game Detective is without a peer.

THE END.

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